PUBLISHED
THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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A New Serial, Three Complete Novelettes

THE star of *Mingan*, Prince of Cathay, foretold power and success to him; the star of the Dynasty prophesied its disaster. So *Mingan* was sentenced to death, but he escaped to the plains and, finding service with *Genghis Khan*, became that mighty warrior's chief advisor, helping him to defeat the *Master Plotter* and the mysterious *Prester John*. Then the forces of the Horde were turned against the Great Wall of Cathay, against his own people, and *Mingan* was forced to choose between two allegiances. The perils *Mingan* encountered, and the choice he made, is told in "THE THREE PALLADINS," a three-part story by Harold Lamb, which begins in the next issue.

BETWEEN France and Switzerland where smugglers worked with impunity, two friends meet. The smuggler and the customs officer face each other, knowing that the outcome of their struggle must be death. "THE LADDERS OF DEATH," a complete novelette in the next issue, by Georges Surdez.

IT WAS a strange mission that *Long* undertook on behalf of the rich Chinese merchant *Quong Yu;* and to succeed he had to study out a plan that would be proof against the hatred of the savage Solomon Islanders for a white man, the wiles of native wizards, the dangers of jungle trails, the pitfall of the cooking-ovens, treachery, continuous danger. "THE TREASURE," by J. Allan Dunn, a novelette complete in the next issue.

IT WAS only a two-for-a-cent revolution, and it failed when the general died. But what he said to his ring of captors in the Honduran jungle before they shot him down a young recruit never forgot, and the words came back with peculiar force to a superintendent of police fighting the gangsters of graft in an American city—with a chance of easy money if he gave up the fight. "WITH WHITE KID GLOVES," by Meigs O. Frost, is one of the three complete novelettes in our next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Adventure is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month

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Author of "Flight," "Groody Hesitates Awhile," etc.

THE tall young man who was making his leisurely way down the quiet street, smiled sardonically as he saw the weaving pedestrian ahead of him stagger slightly, regain his balance, and then continue on his way with determined dignity. With exaggerated care the man ahead placed each foot down as if first making a detailed inspection of the precise spot whereon he planned to tread.

Summer in St. Louis is a season of stewing, enervating heat, but he is indeed captious who can quarrel with the climate of the Missouri metropolis in the Spring. The tall young man swung his slim, black stick easily, drew with enjoyment on his cigaret, and reflected:

"It's all right now, but in a month this town'll melt the hinges of ——. Where do I go this Summer?"

The problem did not bother him for long. He was in a somewhat rosy mental state, himself, although there was no outward indication of inner stimulation. He watched the laborious progress of the man in front of him with sympathy and scientific understanding. He was overtaking the staggering gentleman rapidly, although without design. Long legs and an easy stride covered the ground with deceptive speed.

Near a corner the man stopped, and turned around. With upraised finger which stabbed here and there in the gloom, he seemed to be engaged in some portentous undertaking. His bloated face was massively serious, and his narrowed eyes were peering concentratedly at nothing. The young man in the rear noticed that another figure was approaching around the corner.

He saw the new arrival stop alongside the other man, and then the two figures merged briefly into one. As they separated again the pedestrian who had just arrived on the scene started to retrace his steps with rapidity and precision.

Berwick removed his cigaret and stopped the swing of his stick in midair. Then he started ahead rapidly. Just as he got into his stride a strolling figure with gleaming shirt-front hove into view around the corner.

"Stop that man!" yelled Berwick, breaking into a run.

The man who had apparently interviewed the drunkard so briefly, looked around in startled astonishment.

"You, in evening dress—grab that fellow!"

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Berwick repeated, passing the vaguely gesturing man he had been following.

As the puzzled man in the dinner-coat regained his wits and made a lunge at the victim Berwick had indicated, the fellow leaped sidewise into the street, doubling back. The thoroughfare ahead was wide, well-lighted and busy.

Berwick swerved into the street. One long leg shot out and insinuated itself between the flying feet ahead. The man smote the asphalt heavily.

He was half-stunned, apparently, for he could not get up after superhuman efforts had brought him to his knees.

"Give me back that pocketbook you stole from that drunk over there!" Berwick commanded.

"Wh-whaddaye mean!" snarled the victim, his voice a nasal whine.

The tall, slim Berwick leaned on his stick easily and dragged on the cigaret which, inserted into a long, black holder, was still in his hand.

" 'Squinty' Knype, I see," he remarked conversationally.

"What's all—the—trouble!" wheezed a throaty voice.

The stout man in evening clothes who had first attempted to answer Berwick's plea puffed to the scene of action, and a dozen people had stopped on the lighted corners, hesitating curiously.

The little fellow who was kneeling on the pavement glanced up fearfully as he heard the name.

"Hand it over, and I'll let you go," said Berwick, a hint of weariness in his voice. He did not seem particularly interested in the whole matter.

Without a word Knype handed over a plump bill-case.

"Robbery, eh? gasped the stout man, taking off the straw hat and wiping the perspiration from his bald head.

"Beat it before a cop gets here," Berwick told the crook. "If it wasn't so much bother I'd have you run in. You haven't the elements of a sport in you, Squinty. No self-respecting crook would pick on a drunk."

"Going to let him go?" asked the stout man, replacing his hat.

"He's already gone," returned Berwick solemnly, watching the scuttling little figure which was melting rapidly into the shadows.

The crowd on the corner decided there was nothing doing, and started to move on.

"Let's return this to the exalted bird yonder," suggested Berwick. "—— if he isn't still poking around in the atmosphere. What are pocketbooks in his young life?"

The victim of the robbery had deigned to cease his gyrations momentarily while the chase was on, but had resumed the mysterious movements with his hand long since. Accompanied by his ally, Berwick lounged toward him, his lips quirked humorously as he watched the inexplicable gestures. His companion was still somewhat shy of breath, it seemed, for he said nothing. He was a big man, given to perspiration, and mopped his glowing round face repeatedly with a huge handkerchief.

"Good evening," Berwick hailed as they neared the owner of the pocketbook.

"Sh-h-h!" whispered that gentleman. "I count five of 'em. 'S'at what you make it?"

"Five what?" inquired Berwick?

"Don't you see 'em? I had six of 'em, walkin' single file. Now's only five. Big, fine turkey goblers with beaver hats on 'n green neckties——"

The big man now cut in:

"I'm a doctor," he said in his pleasantly throaty voice. "I'll get an ambulance—I'll phone from the drug store—and you keep him for a while. In a few hours he'll be in bad shape."

Following his decisive words he made off without delay to the store on the corner.

"Your pocketbook was stolen," Berwick said conversationally. "Here it is."

He tucked the bill-fold in the man's inside, coat-pocket, without arousing a symptom of interest. The victim of the robbery was a man of fifty or so, and his rather hard face was hideously bloated. His narrowed eyes, fixed on his imaginary escort of turkey gobblers with beaver hats and green neckties, were suffused with blood, and his fat, pointing finger trembled like a leaf.

Berwick continued to lean on his cane, smoke with enjoyment, and watch the antics of the drunkard with impersonal curiosity. He was in dinner clothes, and as he stood there, his slim body draped in lazy lines, he might have posed for a drawing in the mens' fashion pages which some magazines publish and some men, so they say, read. From straw hat to gleaming, patent-leather slippers his attire radiated taste—and money.

The drunkard needed no company, it

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seemed, for the watching Berwick might have been a dummy for all the notice he got from the custodian of the turkey gobblers. In a few moments the big doctor returned.

"On the way," he said briefly. "Have a cigar?"

Berwick indicated his cigaret with a lazy wave of his hand.

"I haven't thanked you yet for coming to the front," he said. "I'd been watching this dude, and when I saw that fellow size him up, get close, and then beat it I had a wild idea what it was all about. Any bird as drunk as this one is meat for a dip, and I took a chance. Ought to've turned that thug Knype in, I suppose. Thanks for your trouble, sir, anyway."

"Don't mention it," returned the doctor, his cigar at a blithesome angle. "Hello, here comes the wagon."

The ambulance drew to the curb, and the doctor presented his card, said a few words to the white-coated interne in charge, and indicated the prospective patient.

"He's got plenty of money in his pocket—do what you can for him," he said.

Berwick, quietly observant, saw the interne glance at the card, start slightly, look again, and then dart a rapid look at the doctor.

"Is this—" he began, and then his voice was pitched too low for Berwick to hear his words.

"Right, son. Taking a week off," was the jovial reply of the big physician.

"I'm glad to meet you, sir," said the interne. "Well, my friend, let's go!"

A policeman arrived on the scene, was satisfied by a few words from Berwick, whom he called by name, and moved off as the ambulance got under way. It was the doctor's turn to mask his interest, as he saw the policeman touch his hat to Berwick and give him a "good night, sir!"

"—— if that purple-faced, puffy-lipped bird and his dressed-up turkeys wasn't disgusting enough to make a man lay off liquor for life, but I feel like a nip," said the physician without preamble, taking a last swipe at his shiny round head with the handkerchief. "By the way, my name is Gray—Doctor Franklin Gray, of Brandley, West Virginia."

"And I'm Roger Berwick, resident of this town," returned Berwick easily. "I'm glad to know you, sir. As for the drink—I've had a few this evening that're wearing off and I need a slight snort on my own hook. Let's adjourn to the Drayley—over on the next block—and have one."

"You know the town and I don't," assented Gray jovially. "Let's go!"

II

"THE Drayley is a funny place," Berwick told Dr. Gray as they came in sight of the electric sign which marked the location of the hotel. "All the lower grade theatrical people stay there when they play St. Louis—burlesque, and the small-time vaudeville crowd. They run a sort of cabaret, and sometimes it's interesting. I don't play it much, but I know the manager and he gets out the private stock for me."

Neither man had said anything personal during the short walk to the small, dingy-looking hostelry, although Berwick, especially, had some questions he wished to ask. Gray's mention of his home town had sounded familiarly in Berwick's ears, and in addition he had a certain amount of curiosity as to why a West Virginia physician should arouse so much respect in a St. Louis interne.

They entered a long, narrow lobby, with the desk on the left and a double row of chairs, back to back, in the middle, running practically its full length. All four walls were completely covered with photographs, mostly signed, of stage people, running largely to impressively constructed actresses in costumes designed to show as many details of construction as possible. A double-door at the back of the lobby, open, gave a glimpse of well-filled tables, and blaring music came in a blast as they entered. Easily three dozen men were lounging in the lobby, and there was an air of shabby gaiety about the place.

The two men behind the desk called out to Berwick, carefully articulating the "Mister" before his name, and as he and Gray left hats and sticks with the cloak-room girl she also called him by name. They stepped within the low, spacious room, and Gray looked around him interestedly. There was no dancing at the moment, so the new arrivals who were the only ones in the restaurant in evening clothes, were treated to a full inspection by a majority of the

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rather shabbily dressed people who apparently filled every available table to capacity. There was little attempt at ornamentation of the place—crepe-paper hangings, subdued lights, a plain, raised platform for the orchestra and a small dance-floor in the middle surrounded by closely placed tables.

Berwick, apparently unconscious of the slight stir they were creating, looked around leisurely and caught the eye of a short, square-faced man who was hurrying toward them. He wore glasses, and his thin brown hair was plastered low on his forehead.

"Here's Jones—he'll fix us up," Berwick told Gray. "He's manager."

Jones greeted Berwick effusively, called two waiters with snapping fingers, and in a trice they had produced a table, placed it at the edge of the floor, and set it. Jones accompanied them to the table, and bent an attentive ear to Berwick's words.

"I'll come with you and put it in my flask," Berwick concluded. "Two ginger ales and a lot of ice, waiter. Excuse me, Dr. Gray, I'll be back in a moment."

He followed Jones out the door, leaving the genial doctor to inspect his surroundings curiously. The men, almost without exception, were carelessly clad, and seemed to be of the type that worked with their hands. The girls were young, bobbed-haired, many of them hard-faced—probably low-grade chorus girls, Gray decided. The room was heavy with smoke, and conversation was raucous and plentiful.

Gray mused momentarily with Berwick as the subject of his thoughts. The younger man seemed exceptionally tall as he followed the short manager out of the restaurant, the impression of extreme height being strengthened by his slimness. His glossy black hair was parted in the middle over a long, thin face which seemed to have too many lines of weariness in it for a young man.

"Who is that cake-eater that's gettin' all the attention?" came in metallic feminine tones to Gray's ears.

The doctor gave no sign he had heard, but listened curiously.

"Cake-eater!"

That epithet was unutterably contemptuous, spoken in masculine tones, pitched in somewhat lower key than the woman's, but nevertheless distinctly audible to the listening doctor.

"Why that's 'Roj' Berwick!" the second voice went on.

"Well, what're we supposed to do?" demanded the woman. "Bust into tears or jump screamin' out o' the window? Who's Roj Berwick, king o' China 'r somethin'?"

"Nah. But he's worth half a million bucks cold cash, and in the late war—you may o' heard somethin' about bein' a war between us and Germany?—he was flyin' fur over four years, first with the English and then the Americans, and he's an ace. Got seven planes. Boy, what a sport he is! Cake-eater. Huh!"

Gray grinned boyishly at the disgust in the rasping voice. He tried to hear more, but it appeared that the young lady had taken exception to her escort's methods of expressing himself. Even through the blare of the band, which started at the moment, the high pitched voices carried to the doctor, who was beaming genially on the fetid room.

Berwick and the waiter appeared simultaneously as the floor became crowded with dancers. It was in the short skirt era, and the patrons of the Draley believed in no half-way measures. The floor was twinkling with silk-clad legs—not ankles, legs. The dancing was intimate, not to say confidential.

The two new acquaintances sipped their highballs, Gray's face mirroring entire enjoyment and Berwick's rather pallid countenance showing not the slightest tinge of interest. He covertly sized up his companion, noting the remnants of tan on his fleshy face, the clear gray eyes, and a subtle emanation of good health and well-being. Out on the floor were distended red faces, some of them bestial; many of the girls danced mechanically, without interest, while others, heavy-eyed and yielding, had given themselves utterly to the lure of braying jazz and rhythmic rocking and hopping which is the ultimate in modern dancing.

At the conclusion of the number the disheveled, perspiring dancers subsided at tables. Berwick leaned toward Gray.

"Funny place, but as good as any to have a drink at midnight. Don't mind my bringing you here?"

"I'm having a fine time!" declared Gray. "It's out of my line, and hence all the more interesting."

"Did I understand you to say that you came from Brandley, sir?"

"Yes indeed."

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"I have a good friend who's been living there for nearly a year. Name is McCrann—Lawrence McCrann. He's trying to do some civilian flying around there——"

"—owns two little scout airplanes of his own out here," came the deep rasping voice of the man whose conversation regarding Berwick had interested the doctor before.

Berwick glanced over the physician's head, and smiled slightly. Then he nodded to some one as the voice ceased abruptly.

"Taxi-driver I know," he explained casually. "Do you know McCrann by any chance? He——"

"I don't actually know him very well, but I know of him," said Gray heartily. "My daughter, who's married and settled down in Brandley, is quite well acquainted with Mrs. McCrann, I believe. A fine fellow, from what I hear, and bids fair to do well with his flying. Well, well, we are well met, Mr. Berwick. Here's to further acquaintance!"

They drank, and Gray became more talkative. One of Berwick's accomplishments was listening to and stimulating conversation when the man talking had anything of interest to relate.

It was one of the ex-flyer's firmest beliefs that any man was interesting when giving facts or opinions about something with which he was thoroughly familiar, be it how to butcher a hog or how to run a transcontinental railroad, but that the average man talked mostly bromides about things of which he had no first-hand knowledge.

Gray, under Berwick's skilful prodding, revealed the fact that he was a contract doctor to several mines, and that he had expanded his practise until he was sole owner and executive of three big hospitals in three towns, having a staff of twelve doctors and thirty nurses under him.

"Ten mines pay me so much per man per year," he explained. "And I take care of all accidents and that sort of thing. Tend to their families, too."

He went on to describe some of the sudden and horrible emergencies which were always arising, and talked of strange and sometimes revolutionary experiments, many of them successful, which had literally been forced on him during his years of work. Casual mention of the fact that he spent a month at Johns Hopkins and Tulane Universities, and two months at the clinic of two famous brother-surgeons in Minnesota each year to keep abreast of the latest developments in his profession, as well as casual references to the reaction of the medical profession to some of the articles he had written for medical journals, gave Berwick the key to the respect and recognition which the youthful interne had shown. It appeared that he was sharing a table with a very noted surgeon.

The tale which Gray unfolded was an epic in its way—that buried in a small town in West Virginia there should be a man who for twenty years had been a pioneer, oftimes showing his city and university brethren the way, and meeting and surmounting hideous emergencies by his genius. Between the lines Berwick could read an entire disregard for fame, and a consuming passion for his work. And as he listened, weary dark eyes aglow with interest, the younger man's lurking expression of discontent, almost bitterness, became deeper.

"About every couple of months I have to break loose," Gray was explaining. "Take a week or two in New York, Chicago, St. Louis, Washington—somewhere; have a few drinks, see some good shows, kick over the traces a bit. Loosens me up to stand the strain. I'm a widower and the two kids are married and have their own homes. It's taken me fifty years to learn how to enjoy myself, Mr. Berwick, and I enjoy life today more than I ever have!"

The kindly, full blue eyes beamed into Berwick's, and the younger man had a sudden impression that Gray's words held a hint of deliberate meaning for him.

As a matter of fact, they did. The elderly doctor had been studying his companion, and as his liking grew so did his insight into what sort of a man he had with him. His questions about Berwick's war career had brought careless answers admitting four years of flying with the Royal Air Force and the American army, but no hint of being an ace. And in the moments of silence that air of weariness, boredom, descended on him like a deadening pall. The riotous gaiety around him seemed to pass over him entirely, leaving him unmoved and uninterested.

The Drayley was getting in its stride, now; there were two incipient fights, and one swaggering, broad-shouldered youth with a broken nose got the bum's rush from an efficient flying wedge of waiters. Three

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or four actors were called on for impromptu entertainment, which was furnished readily. The smoke grew thicker, the music louder and more intriguing, the patrons drunker.

Finally Berwick gestured suddenly with one slim, long-fingered hand.

"Had enough, sir?"

"Plenty. I leave tomorrow, early, and need some sleep, too. I'm getting old, my boy."

Gray settled the check, and they went out. Berwick nodded to several men who seemed flattered at the attention. After reclaiming their hats and canes they hailed a night-hawk taxi which was lying in wait for lucrative patronage.

It proved that the doctor was registered at the Masterson, where Berwick lived permanently. At the elevator Berwick held out his hand smilingly.

"Don't be surprized if I turn up in Brandley within a few days," he said in his habitually modulated, precise tone. "McCrann is a real good friend of mine, and he's been asking me to look him up for a long time. If not, don't forget me when you hit town again."

"I won't, and thank you for a very enjoyable hour," returned Gray, whose thick fingers felt like steel as they gripped Berwick's slim hand. "And come to Brandley if you can. I, personally, shall be glad to see you. Good night!"

III

BERWICK let himself into his suite and turned on a huge, dully-draped lamp which stood guard over a deeply cushioned chair in one corner of the sitting-room. The dim light brought into view a luxurious apartment, furnished in dull browns, reds and greens. Four well-filled bookcases and a stand piled with periodicals lent a touch of home-like comfort which harmonized with smoking-stands, many pipes, three or four stuffed heads and some souvenirs of the air which decorated the walls.

There was a huge, wonderfully made propeller with an inscription on the hub: "Captain Roger Berwick, Air Service, from the crew of The Crow," a tattered bit of linen, with the painted insignia of the Krutoffen Circus on it, and other mementoes. The Crow had been the name of the little scout in which he had brought down the famous German ace whose ship had supplied that tattered souvenir of linen, and the proud crew of the Crow had presented their pilot with that hand-made propeller, laminated from bits of various propellers which had been split in numerous wrecks and battles in the air. Not one of the hundreds of pieces in it but had a story attached.

Berwick went into the bedroom, removed his hat, coat and waistcoat, and put on a silk dressing-gown which would have cost the monthly pay of the average man. He came back into the sitting-room and threw himself into a chair. On a table alongside it there were several letters. He ran through them hastily, stopping at one which bore the postmark "Brandley, W. Va.," and was addressed in the sprawling chirography of Larry McCrann.

Berwick grinned; he had half-expected that letter. He opened it, and a check fluttered to the floor. He let it lie there while he ran quickly over the few words which, in McCrann's handwriting, covered the big sheet completely. The printed heading read:

LAWRENCE McCRANN
AERIAL TRANSPORTATION
Bercrann Field
Brandley, W. Va.

Bercrann Field had been named from a combination of the two names, Berwick and McCrann. He had loaned McCrann five thousand dollars to supplement the Irishman's own nest-egg in order to start the project. The letter ran:

DEAR ROJ:

Enclosed is check for last quarter's interest. Meant to mail it yesterday but forgot. However, I guess one day late isn't so bad for an amateur business man, at that. Hope you didn't have to economize on any of the necessities of life because you didn't get it on time.

Cleared around three hundred last month, and it should get better from now on. My original idea was O. K.—the only trouble now is that I find I've run into local politics a little and that there is a movement afoot on the part of a certain element here to make it hard for me. Haven't time to write the details, but it's a cinch they're not going to put anything over on me if I know it.

Wish you could drag yourself from your gilded cage a while and drop in. Mary is anxious to meet you, and I'd enjoy a breath of the old days and the outer world again. The spare room awaits any time you want to come, and the longer you stay the better—both for us and you, I presume.

Selah. LARRY.

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That last line was like the big Irishman. Berwick let the rest of the mail lie neglected by his hand as his thoughts turned wistfully back to those years in France. He had been born to the St. Louis shade of purple, and up to his twentieth year had been under the wing of his uncle. He could not remember either his mother or father. He had left the university at the end of the junior year and joined the Royal Air Force, to his generous uncle's profound disgust.

He had had a large allowance which had been cut off on his entry into the conflict, and it remained cut until the St. Louis papers suddenly screamed with the news of his first two Hun planes. From that time forth his uncle could not contain his pride, and money flowed toward France in streams. Then came the entry of America into the war, his transfer, and further triumphs.

Through those last months big Larry McCrann, son of a drunken father and product of years of sordid labor in an endeavor to lift himself from the slums whence he sprang, had been Berwick's closest friend. They were as different as day is from night, but in some way they drifted together and were held by widely differing qualities. The brilliant, careless Berwick brought lightness and the power of enjoyment into the mature Irishman's hitherto circumscribed life, and in turn McCrann was like an anchor to windward for Berwick and other prominent masters of wassail in the squadron. McCrann loved, disapproved, bullied and cajoled Berwick—it was always Larry who kept his head in Nancy or Paris and saw to it that Roj got back to duty on time.

Then swift separation, immediately after the war, for the uncle had died while still engulfed in pride and happiness, and left a matter of a half-million dollars to his nephew. There were a few months of work closing out the business and turning it over to the new owners, and then Berwick, who beneath his rather restrained exterior hid a consuming joy in life, had started his wild career. For some time he devoted himself to painting several of the larger cities a bright shade of pink, if not actually red.

McCrann had appeared suddenly, given the news that he was married, and that he was no longer fit for the Air Service as the result of a gas attack which had taken place when he was liaison officer with the artillery. Years in the open, with no hard work, was the sentence handed out to him, and purely by accident he had run across an opportunity to indulge in his almost fanatical love of the air and have a chance to make money, as well.

Berwick had loaned the five thousand needed, and after McCrann's visit settled back into indolent enjoyment again. He had balanced his life unerringly between the cream and the dregs; to the débutantes and their set he was a tall, slim, good-looking chap who danced divinely, made love mockingly, was chronically indifferent in his attitude, and was vaguely referred to as "wild." To a large circle which included gamblers, taxi-drivers, people of the stage, and other cosmopolitan sections of the submerged nine-tenths he was a man who could—and did, in increasing measure—absorb an ungodly amount of whisky without getting drunk, was never up-stage, seemed to enjoy learning the ins and outs of life as they lived it, and never forgot who he was even though he didn't mention it.

That had been his life, and for some months it had palled. No moral reflections on his uselessness bothered him—he was simply sick of it. And to escape from deadly boredom he had plunged more deeply into the pursuit of pleasure, his only safeguard a natural good taste and self-respect which always kept him from ascending the heights—or plumbing the depths—of ribaldry in its more vulgar aspects.

It was an actual fact that he had not drawn a strictly sober breath for three months. Neither had there been a moment when he could have been said to be drunk. There was discontent and restlessness in the lazy eyes, and barely perceptible pouches beneath them. There was a hint of flabbiness in the flesh around the clean-lined jaw—and there were fractious lines that did not belong in the face of a twenty-eight-year-old young man who had never had a sick day in his life.

That evening, Berwick reflected, his disgust had reached a climax. The genial doctor's unassuming words of accomplishment and content, spoken while he was thoroughly enjoying a taste of the fleshpots, had helped to drive him into a state where he felt fed up with life as represented by the fetid, over-stimulated, monotonous brand he was living.

Suddenly he threw back his head and laughed aloud. An invisible observer, who

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might have been unfavorably impressed by the pallid, discontented, languid young man of exotic tastes and surroundings,would have immediately changed his opinion after that spontaneous laugh, for it gave the lie to the outward semblance of Roger Berwick. It was youthful and full of zest, and seemed to tell of something real and unspoiled within.

"—— if I'm not talking like the hero of one of these 'God's great outdoors' stories," Berwick chuckled to himself. "Sick of the city, go out into the clean open places where a man's a man."

The healthy mockery had its effect. However, he did make a decision, which was nothing more astounding or revolutionary than to take one of his two planes, fly over to West Virginia and have a few days with McCrann. Suddenly he felt starved for the things which McCrann represented to him by association—days of free-and-easy, take-no-thought-for-the-morrow comradeship, spiced with danger and the lure of the job.

For a moment his natural indolence nearly made him give up the idea—it would be a lot of trouble; Larry was married now.

"Oh, ——, snap out of it!" he admonished himself with a grin. "What you need is a change of scene to remove the spiritual jaundice."

Whereupon he called a bell-boy and gave him a night letter to send.

Will drop in within two or three days by plane. You are entirely too small to fight your own battles alone and I'm worried sick over the safety of my investment. I have no doubt that your incurable bad habits have made you neglect business. Reserve the spare room indefinitely.

R. B.

IV

AT TEN o'clock the next morning, having bathed, shaved and absorbed the morning nourishment, he telephoned to ex-Sergeant Frank Nesson, one-time chief mechanic of the 313th squadron and now in charge of Berwick's two high-priced cars and two S. E. 5 airplanes. Nesson had one airplane mechanic as assistant—Berwick usually drove his own car—and considered that he had a job which could not be improved on. He and his wife had a cottage on the outskirts of the city, near the small field which Berwick rented.

Nesson was very short, very dark, very efficient and absolutely reliable. He knocked on the door in the minimum time necessary for him to proceed with maximum celerity from his home to the hotel, and at Berwick's shouted invitation came in.

"Good mornin', sorr," he said, his snub-nosed, heavy face wrinkling into a grin.

"Morning, Frank. Frank, the city weakling is about to confide himself to the healing powers of God's great outdoors. He will shake off the vices of the city, rescue some mysterious and beautiful young woman from the clutches of the corn-fed villains, and thereby find his own soul and get roped into matrimony for life."

Nesson, round-eyed, listened patiently. There was a twinkle in his steady gray eyes, and he ran his fingers through his short, dark hair, which grew low on his forehead.

"Yes, sorr," he said conservatively.

It usually took him a few moments to plumb his idolized employer's devious methods of expressing himself, and there was constant interest in keeping up with him.

"Have a cigaret, Frank? Well, what it means is this: I'm going over to Brandley, West Virginia, to visit Larry McCrann. You remember him, of course. So I want the extra-tank S. E. ready early in the morning, and you can call for me here at, say, six o'clock. It's an ungodly hour, Frank, but it's better than spending a night *en route*, so to speak. You won't need to go. Don't know how long I'll be gone, so hold the fort till I return. Got it?"

"Yes, sorr."

"Good. Give my regards to the wife, and warn her that when I land from the return trip I expect to eat several chunks of her apple pie and drink several bottles of your villainous home brew, so be prepared."

"Yes, sorr, Good mornin'."

Berwick devoted the rest of the day to "tapering off," which was a complicated schedule of smaller and smaller drinks taken further and further apart, and to cleaning up his mail with the aid of a public stenographer. He shipped a wardrobe trunk by express to Brandley, ate a large and hearty supper, read the evening papers, and was tossing restlessly in bed from nine o'clock on.

He was ready for Nesson and the car in the morning, arrayed in old Army breeches and boots, gray flannel shirt, and equipped with the precious helmet and goggles which

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had gone through many a scrap with him in the war days.

The tiny little scout was warming up as he got out of the car. He knew absolutely that the ship was in perfect condition, for Nesson had said so. He had a thrill of pride as he listened to the smooth purr of the hundred-and-eighty horse-power motor and ran his eye over the glistening little ship, which seemed distinctly feminine in its trim, shining beauty. The landing and flying wires were stream-lined by means of wooden strips wedged between the parallel wires, and in tiny details such as the compass which swung on top of the cockpit and the extra-size tires the ship was the last word in aircraft. It was of the same type he had flown in France—tiny, fast, handling like a feather, almost overpowered by the smooth-running French motor which had proved itself so often in the test of battle.

The mechanic hopped out, and Berwick folded his long legs in the cockpit, running his eye over the instruments casually. He tried the motor on each magneto separately, and it ran perfectly. Then he switched the gas control from pressure tank to reserve gravity tank, shifted the air-pump control from the main tank, tried the ship in every way. Never a missed beat in the whispering, sweet-running eight cylinders—the pointers which indicated sixty pounds oil pressure, three pounds of air, r.p.m. of five hundred and temperature of eighty did not even vibrate, so well-rigged was the ship and so perfectly timed was the motor.

"I'll let you know a day or two before I start back!" he shouted, and Nesson nodded. "Pull the blocks!"

His groping hand made sure the Colt was in its proper niche under the seat—as a reserve officer he had finally got permission to carry it legally, although he would have carried it anyway—and then he reached for the throttle. It had been over a month since he had flown, and there was a quick thrill as the S. E. leaped forward like a live thing. In a trice it was at full speed—in fifty yards it soared upward like a humming dragon-fly under Berwick's experienced, loving hand.

Berwick throttled the motor, which was turning an even two thousand revolutions, to sixteen hundred, but even then the ship bored upward in steep curves that caused the earth to drop away as rapidly as it would rush up to meet a ship which was spiraling down. There are few ships which will actually spiral upward—lifting surface decreases in a bank—but the S. E. 5 is one of them.

Three thousand feet high Berwick started for the sprawling brown blotch on the ground which represented St. Louis, and over the middle of the city he watched his compass carefully, flying eastward. The Mississippi dropped behind him, and in a few moments he was over the thinning suburbs. He watched his map closely, for it would be very annoying to finally follow the wrong railroad. Fifteen minutes later, by the aid of landmarks on the ground, he was certain that he was over the right tracks, and settled down to follow the shining steel path to Louisville, his first stop.

He wound up the adjustable stabilizer, which controls the angle of the tail-surfaces and by means of which the pilot is able to attain perfect fore-and-aft stability. When it was finally adjusted to correspond with the r.p.m. of the motor he was able to take his hand from the stick. He was five thousand feet high now, and there were no bumps to throw the ship around. The clear morning air was smooth as glass, and the little ship, controlled only by the rudder, sang its way along as straight as a die.

In three hours he was in sight of the Ohio River, and ten minutes later, with the gas supply very low, he was spiraling down over Bowman Field, where he knew that the city maintained a landing-field for civilian and Army pilots, in charge of an officer and several mechanics furnished by the Government.

He was greeted by stout, smiling, Lieutenant Brown, and in a half-hour had procured gas and oil, paid for it, and was on his way up the Ohio to Moundsville, another Government station on the Dayton-Washington Airway.

The course was simply the muddy, tranquil Ohio, and the hardest job facing the pilot to cut the tremendous bends. To the south stretched the famed hills of Kentucky, looking deserted and sinister even in the flooding sunlight. First Indiana, and then Ohio lay on the northern side of the river, a thin fringe of hills like a barrier against the river to protect the smiling level fields further north. Cincinnati was left behind in an hour, and it was shortly after one o'clock when he picked up the

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long, narrow field on the outskirts of Moundsville which was his goal. It was marked with a T, facing the long way of the field toward the river.

"Well, I'm in West Virginia anyway, if I never get any further," Berwick told himself as he spiraled down. "From now on, not so easy."

While he was waiting for gas and oil he consumed the sandwiches and a small thermos bottle of coffee he had brought along, and studied his map closely. To Charleston—that was easy, but from there on it was not so simple. And the terrane was far from ideal. Brandley, a small dot on his map, was in the midst of the mountains, but it was on a main-line railway. To follow railroads all the way would take him far from his course—he decided to miss Charleston altogether and strike a compass course, planning to strike the railroad which would lead him into Brandley by cutting the angle.

It was close to two o'clock when the S. E. 5 started across the towering mountains, but there was only two hours left to go. The oil-grimed, weary Berwick was glad of it. His ears were ringing with the perpetual drum of the motor—he gave silent thanks that he did not have twelve mighty cylinders of Liberty motor roaring their lullaby in his tender ears.

He was unable to appreciate to its fullest the majestic panorama unfolding below him for thinking of what would hapepn should the motor falter. Looking down to his right the tree-clad mountaintop was less than two thousand feet below; to the left, the deep-cut gorge, at its lowest, was nearly a mile beneath him.

He had made allowance for the wind in figuring his course, and watched his compass like a hawk to make sure that he never swerved from the air-line. At intervals he would sight for a minute or two, using the edge of the fuselage against the ground, to see whether he was drifting to right or left. It would be far from pleasant to get lost in that country.

An hour and a half passed, and the first of two creeks which the map showed to empty into the Kanawa River had been left behind. The second one should come in sight very soon now. The sole landmark to tell him whether or not he was anywhere near his course was a right-angled bend in that creek—the only one which the map showed. If he could see that bend he was all right, and would strike the railroad a few miles above Brandley.

Far ahead he could see a narrow depression, which showed, here and there, small, hilly, usually half-cleared, fields. That creek should bisect the valley. In a few moments he was over the narrow strip of clearings—and there was the creek. Better yet, five miles or so northward was the bend he was looking for. He swerved toward it, got over it, and reset his course eastward. There was a towering mountain directly ahead, with no clearings between the stream and its crest. To all four points of the compass there was a vista of mountains—not a really level spot could he see. Twining around them somewhere was the railroad.

Soon the ground, covered with its heavy mantle of trees, swelled upward sharply, breaking into steep, high cliffs and slight depressions, but steadily rising to the flat, thinly wooded crest of the slope. Berwick looked down idly at the ground suddenly so near him.

He banked sharply, until his wings were nearly at right angles to the ground, in order to get a better look. He drew in his breath involuntarily. Down there in the wide-spaced trees there was the wreck of an airplane.

IN SWOOPING spirals the little scout hummed downward with half-throttled motor. In the mind of the pilot there was the constant wonder whether that was one of McCrann's ships—perhaps Larry himself. He was not sure, but he thought he saw the body of a man lying half-clear of the wreckage, as motionless as the inanimate wood and linen itself.

He was scraping the tree-tops when he straightened and sent the S.E. darting toward the wreck. As he got over it he lifted his ship in a steep climbing turn that gave him an excellent opportunity for ten seconds' continuous observation. There was a man down there, probably dead, but perhaps still alive. The prone body protruded from the wreckage.

With one hand he succeeded in fighting the wind enough to get at his map. He was right in his recollection of the terrane. The stream behind him curved slightly around that mountain, straightened again, and flowed toward the Kanawa. And ten

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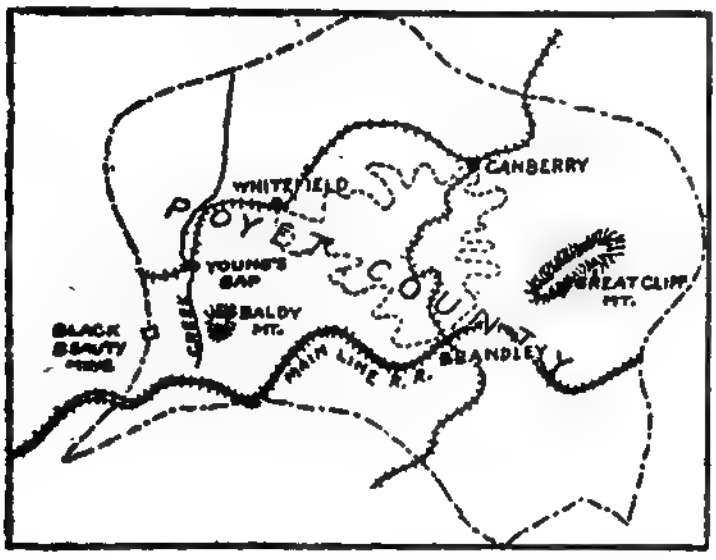
miles down it there was a town—Young's Gap by name.

There was nothing to do but go to Young's Gap and organize a rescue party. It took but a moment for the staunch ship to clear the mountain, which sloped very steeply down to the valley floor that wound between the continuous hills. There was



the stream, curving northeast and then resuming its course to the river. Once again there were isolated cabins and ragged clearings. A brown country road, scarcely more than a lane, led toward town.

Came the second surprize of the last ten minutes.

"Great guns, if there isn't another!" breathed Berwick, peering steadily downward.

A ship had cracked up, evidently in an endeavor to make a forced landing, smashing into the trees at the end of a tiny clearing which was less impossible than any other landing place in sight.

"This is a —— of a place for an aviation field, but apparently ships are like flies around this country," solioquized Berwick. "I hope I'm wrong, but it looks like a tough day for the McCrann Airplane Transportation Company!"

It took but a short time for him to see that there were no human beings around that wreck—or near it, for that matter. Three or four miles away was a cabin perched on the top of a plowed field on the side of the mountain, and in front of it were four people. Then his eye fell on the road which wound along a quarter-mile below the cabin. Two men were walking along it, and as Berwick spiraled lower he could see that the tallest one carried a rifle. A moment later, now a thousand fleet high, he saw the other man throw his head back to look at the ship overhead, and the sun flashed from goggles which were pushed up on his forehead.

"Must be the second batch, but they're all right—probably the fellow with the gun is from the house and there was only one man in it. Thank heaven for that!"

For a moment he remained undecided. Had the two ships been together, and was the man down on the road aware of his fellow-pilot's wreck? He wondered whether there was any way he might get into communication with the men below, but it did not take long to make up his mind that landing was an impossibility. Young's Gap was only a few minutes away, and it would be possible to drive a car within three miles of the mountain-top.

He could not bank on the flyer below—it was probable that he, too, was going after help, but even the slight chance that he was not cognizant of the other wreck on the mountain was too great to take. That motionless body up there was a perfect picture of the grimmest tragedy the men of the air face: a bad wreck far from help, and unlikely to be discovered.

A new problem faced him as, less than a thousand feet high, he flashed along toward Young's Gap. In all probability he could not land—safely, at any rate. It was characteristic of Berwick that he took it for granted that he would try to get down some way, ship or no ship, injury or no injury. The only problem was where, not whether he could or not.

In five minutes Young's Gap sprang into view as if by magic. It was a small village, nestling at the foot of a mountain. Three miles beyond it the uniform, dirty gray frame houses of a mining settlement clung to the mountainside. There was one long, wide street, lined with frame buildings—the town itself was really two rows of frame buildings, parallelling the creek, and the foot-hills rose from the very backyards of the houses on the right side of the street.

There were a few small garden patches, and one field on the mountainside that might be possible—no, it was not, for it was full of stumps. Crack up in a garden, he thought.

A sudden idea, at first fantastic, became more workable as he thought of it. There were but two cars in the street below, both parked. There were several more in the distinctly residential section, but there was

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a strip more than three hundred yards long which was blocked by just those two vehicles. He felt sure he could get around those, and he knew that there would be several feet of clearance for his wings between the wires which lined the street on each side. Once below those, he would have at least twenty feet of clearance, for the wing-spread of the single-seater was only slightly over twenty feet.

As he dropped lower his eyes could find no car approaching, and there were no side roads. One of the cars which were drawn up in alleys might dash out, but he would indicate his intention as far as possible.

The sidewalks were populated rapidly as the town turned out to see the ship. Berwick swept back over the houses, straightened out parallel with the highway and perhaps a hundred feet high. He was several hundred yards back of the business section, where the road was widest.

With half-throttled motor he stalled down, calling on all the skill of the time when his power over a scout ship had been the doom of many an opponent. His head was over the side, watching the wires, and his gaze flashed ahead every few seconds to see that the coast was clear.

At the edge of the line of stores the S.E.5 dropped between the wires, and in a second had hit the road-bed with a bone-cracking jar—but on three points. The sturdy landing gear held—not even a tire went bad. It bounced once, and then ran along the road. Disaster loomed in the shape of a gasolene pump, but there was just speed enough to make the rudder work, and Berwick swerved around it by inches.

A horde of men and women swept toward him. He shut off the motor instantly, cursing the fact that he had to misuse the motor that way, but some of those people would undoubtedly step into the propeller if it continued its revolutions.

There were angry faces, interested faces, grinning faces milling around him as he stood up in the cockpit.

"Just a minute, please!" he yelled.

He finally secured quiet.

"I landed here because it was the only place I could land and there is an emergency. Back on the mountain a ship is wrecked, and the pilot is either badly hurt or dead. I want a car and four or five men to go with me to get him. I saw him as I passed over—don't know who it is, or anything."

A stout man with a round face and stiff white mustache inserted a question—

"Top o' Old Baldy there?"

"That first mountain on the left," Berwick told him. "How about it?"

There were a few more questions, and then the fat man said:

"There's my Ford. I'll go. How 'bout you, Jim?"

The cadaverous, black-shirted Jim pulled his scrawny brown mustache, tilted his disreputable black hat over his eyes, and finally allowed he would. Two young fellows, one a garage mechanic, volunteered eagerly.

Berwick appealed to the stout old man, who proved to be postmaster and druggist, for advice about where to leave his plane.

"Could we run it up alongside the sidewalk, and could I get some reliable person to see that no one climbs all over it? I'll pay him well——"

"Sure, son," replied the old fellow in a fatherly tone. "Here, you Zeke! Zeke's my boy. He'll tend to it."

There were unquestionably over a hundred people about, now, and excited discussion and exaggerated rumors were on the lips of those on the outskirts of the group. Belated arrivals drew up in breathless curiosity every few seconds.

With Berwick directing, three men helped him trundle the scout to the curb, leaving the road open enough, and the gangling Zeke, a pimply-faced youth of eighteen, took charge importantly.

"None o' yuh come nearer'n ten feet!" bellowed the postmaster with sudden authority.

Berwick blessed the chance that had given him an ally who seemed to have weight in the metropolis of Young's Gap.

V

LESS than ten minutes after he had descended upon the village he was *en route* back toward Old Baldy. The postmaster, whose name was Peters, drove the Ford as fast as any Ford ought to be driven, and he showed a vast contempt for the soft, cuppy road. He had furnished first-aid materials—Young's Gap boasted no doctor.

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Berwick told his story again as they made fast progress toward their goal, and answered innumerable questions of a personal nature propounded by the powerfully built mechanic and the bespectacled dry-goods clerk who, coatless and hatless, was the most enthusiastic member of the party.

Berwick had momentary doubts as to whether it would not prove to be a case of much haste and little speed, for his assistants did not seem to be of the type who would be most at home in mountain climbing. The sad-looking Jim, whose last name was Chatfield, looked and acted as if every breath he drew would be his last on earth, and his eyes were fixed mournfully on nothingness, as if contemplating the hallelujah strand to which it seemed he was momentarily about to start.

Berwick answered questions mechanically, but his mind was busy with speculations as to how much McCrann was affected by the events of the afternoon. The Irishman had mentioned some trouble—it was possible that those two wrecked ships had a tale attached to them which would be far from pleasant from the point of view of the McCrann Aerial Transportation Company.

The little car topped an undulating rise, and Berwick noted what seemed to be the cabin he had spotted from the air. Far down the road two figures could be seen, and in a moment he saw that the taller man had a gun.

"There's the two men who were wrecked right down this road a little way," he told the cherubic old driver. "Let's stop and see if they know anything about it. I don't know whether they both were in the ship, at that, but I saw helmet and goggles on one of them."

In the rear seat the elongated, sallow Chatfield tilted his battered, dusty, black hat over his eyes and peered ahead.

"Feller on the right looks like Jeff Calhoun tuh me, Mr. Peters," he stated languidly. "An' me withouten no gun, too."

The rotund postmaster jumped as if pricked.

"That's just who 'tis, Jim. You set still an' let me handle this, understand?"

The mild blue eyes were suddenly like gimlets, cold and small, behind the round glasses.

"Yes, sir," answered Chatfield wearily.

Berwick, lounging easily in the front seat, turned to look at the mountaineer. He was chewing one end of his moth-eaten mustache, looking more mournful than ever.

"Wonder what Jeff was adoin' over this way—s'pose he was in that airyplane, Mr. Peters?"

"I don't know, but neither of you make no false moves," commanded Peters energetically.

They came to a stop with grinding brakes, and the fat man was out of the car in a flash. Berwick was astounded at the quickness of the mild old fellow's movements. He wondered briefly why the dry-goods clerks' face was so pale, and at the blazing interest in the husky mechanic's face.

" 'Lo, you, Jeff Calhoun," greeted Peters. "Where'd you drop from?"

"Howdy, Mr. Peters," was the easy reply from the tall mountaineer.

He was chewing tobacco, and his eyes rested briefly on the car and its occupants. Berwick got out, followed by the steady gaze of the slim, sharp-faced man who was still wearing helmet and goggles. He noticed that Calhoun had a nasty bump on his temple.

Calhoun's eyes finally came to rest on Jim Chatfield, who was sitting quietly in the rear seat.

"Howdy, Chatfield," he said, very softly.

He made as if to shift his gun. Like a streak of light Peters had thrust out both hands and grasped the barrel.

"None o' that, Jeff Calhoun, or you'll swing for it! Jim's unarmed——"

Calhoun spat leisurely, scratched his head, covered with sparse black hair, and then wiped his drooling mouth with the back of his hand. He was hatless, and his scalp showed grimy with dirt below the thin hair. His face was long and narrow, and his nose was so elongated and thin as to be ludicrous. There were deep hollows around the jaws, as though the man had no teeth. His slightly lisping speech bore this out. His eyes were small, very black, and close-set, and beneath the nose his mouth was small, thin-lipped, pinched. His chin was in harmony with the rest of his facial architecture, being long, pointed, and slightly receding.

After finishing the scratching operation at his leisure, Calhoun spat again and once more wiped his mouth. Then he met the eyes of the little, fat old man who was holding the gun in his pudgy hands. Calhoun's

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whole attitude was one of contemptuous leisure, and yet in the way his eyes shifted there was a trace of respect—perhaps even fear.

"I was jest changin' it, Mr. Peters. If Chatfield hain't armed, I'm willin' to let things be now."

Peters relaxed with a sigh of relief. Jim Chatfield chewed the other side of his mustache, and slouched a little further down in his seat. The clerk sighed soulfully, and the mechanic looked as if he wanted to say—

"Oh, ——!"

Berwick now decided to take a hand. With his usual quiet, aloof air he had watched the little drama curiously.

"I'm the man flew over you a few minutes ago. I saw your wreck, and knew you were all right."

He was addressing himself to the red-headed pilot. The man had a straight, sharp little nose, a thin mouth, and very keen, hard reddish-brown eyes. Above them his eyebrows slanted sharply, meeting over his nose at almost a right angle and running down sharply. The effect of them was heightened by the slightly pursed mouth—the man seemed always about to exclaim over something. Although his freckled face was thin, there were two deep lines from thin nostrils to his mouth, and there was a curious impression of age about him.

"Yeah?" he said, eyes steadily on Berwick. His voice was metallic.

"There's another wreck up on top of the mountain—I saw one man in it. Did you happen to see how it happened?"

It was as if he had suddenly lighted two tiny lamps in the depths of the reddish eyes.

"Another crash? Whaddaye know 'bout that? No, I didn't see nothing at all. I had a forced landing where you seen me—hadn't been over the mountain yet. Whaddaye know about that!"

"You don't work for McCrann over at Brandley, do you?" asked the calm Berwick, his attitude seeming utterly uninterested and without excitement.

For a moment the other pilot's eyes bored steadily into Berwick's. There was sudden tension.

"No. Why?"

"He's a friend of mine, and I was going over to see him. Probably the other ship does, though. Where do you hail from?"

"Flew over here from Huntington, —— it. I carry passengers."

"You with him, Mr. Calhoun?" asked Berwick casually, as if making polite conversation.

The leisurely Calhoun darted a look at the pilot, as though non-plused for a moment. Berwick wondered whether he was wrong in thinking that there was something unnaturally strained about an interview that should have been utterly natural

"No, Mr. Calhoun here just happened along as I fell," the pilot cut in smoothly.

Calhoun spat again, wiped his mouth, and resumed his slow chewing.

Berwick started to ask another question, but caught himself as he met Peters' eye. As plainly as if the forceful old man had spoken the words, Berwick got the message of warning.

"My name's Berwick," he said instead of asking the question he meant to. He held out his hand. "I'm sure sorry you had bad luck, and that we must gallop along to see whether that poor bird up on the hill is alive or not."

"Harley," vouchsafed the other airman pursing his lips a trifle more.

They shook hands, their eyes meeting as if each were trying to read the mind of the other. There was strained silence, broken by Calhoun's deep voice.

"I'd like tuh see yuh a minute, private-like, Mr. Peters," he said.

Peters led the way a few yards down the road with short, choppy strides, followed by the long-legged Calhoun. Jim Chatfield's gaze followed them and remained on them steadily. Berwick leaned against the hood of the car, offered a cigaret to Harley, and lit one himself.

"They were surprized to see Calhoun here—and where did he get that bruise?" he was asking himself, and wondering whether the inevitable answer was right or not.

"What was your ship—Jenny?" he asked Harley.

Harley nodded.

"Were you in the Army during the war? Learn to fly there, I mean?"

"Nah. I was a mechanic for the Curton Company from 1914 on. Learnt to fly that way."

"Old-timer, eh?" rejoined Berwick genially. "Tough game when you're flying your own ship and the motor goes dead

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over country like this. Can you salvage anything?"

"Nah. Gone to ——"

The little fellow did not seem unduly cast down about the loss of his ship, which stamped him as a very good loser. Berwick controlled a smile as he stole a glance at his brother airman—that look of perpetual astonishment on Harley's face was almost nerve-wracking. It made him feel as if the man was always about to say something either humorous or important.

Peters and Calhoun came back. Peters' round face solemn. His lower teeth, so even and white that Berwick was certain they were false, chewed rapidly at the ends of his white mustache.

"Well, we got to go, gents," he said briskly. "See you all later, boys."

Calhoun surveyed the occupants of the car from the side of the road, his long rifle held carelessly. Chatfield leaned out of the car as the motor started.

"Better stick tuh your own country, Jeff," he said wearily. "I'll have a gun next time. Mebbe I'll return your call right soon."

"Now, now—" barked Peters, and started the car with a jerk.

Berwick asked no questions, waiting for Peters to volunteer information. Apparently there was none to be forthcoming.

The old man drove silently, eyes resting steadily on the road ahead, which was growing rougher with each mile. There was grass growing in the middle of it now. The cherubic countenance of the Young's Gap postmaster was unwontedly serious. Berwick decided, rather from instinct than any definite reason, that it would be best, perhaps, to hide his curiosity.

VI

FOR ten minutes they bumped along. The excitable dry-goods clerk talked in spasms, his chatter meaning nothing. The mechanic held his peace save for monosyllabic answers, and Chatfield did not even grunt. Finally Peters asked abruptly—

"You say you're goin' over to see this McCrann feller, that's got the airplanes at Brandley?"

"Yes, he's an old Army friend of mine," returned Berwick.

"You ain't in the army now, are you?"

The question was asked sharply, as if Peters were suddenly upset.

"No—that's my own private pleasure ship. I live in St. Louis, as I guess I told you."

"This is no country fur airplanes," stated Peters fretfully. "You better tell your friend the quicker he gives up the better off his bank account'll be."

"Here's the best place, Mr. Peters," sighed Chatfield from the back seat. "We can git a trail half-way up from here."

"That's so. I was thinkin' of somethin' else, and I was like to drive right past it."

He drove the car on some short grass between the road and a line of trees. They were at the foot of the mountain, which rose steeply from within a few hundred yards of the road. The first-aid kit was divided between the four, and they set off immediately, Chatfield leading the way with long, awkward strides that nevertheless had the clerk puffing a bit to keep up after they started the real climb. To the airman's surprize Peters kept up easily, seeming to be perfectly capable of holding his own despite his age.

For two hours, without any pause for rest, they made their way up the mountain. There were intervals of easy climbing, and two occasions when there were breathless scrambles around steep cliffs, clinging to tree-trunks and well-rooted bushes to keep from sliding down the nearly perpendicular slopes.

It was five-thirty by Berwick's watch when the silent Chatfield, stalking ahead, said over his shoulder—

"Half a mile o' good walkin' now."

The forest was thinning, and in ten minutes they emerged on almost level ground. There was a slight rise in the middle of the clearing, which was the crest of Old Baldy, and the tail-surface of the plane could be seen thrust above the top of the rise. Chatfield did not increase his pace but walked along, his eyes on the ground. Berwick was too hot and spent to have any heart to run forward, so in single file they followed Chatfield.

They stopped involuntarily when they came in sight of the wreck. Apparently the ship had hit head-on, for everything except the tail-surfaces was telescoped together, the motor in the center of a scrambled heap of wood, linen and wire, with the motor showing through the interstices. The pilot

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had been thrown from the cockpit, apparently.

Berwick brushed past Chatfield and the awe-struck natives. No examination was needed. The entire top of the pilot's head had been taken off, and the brains were lying three feet from the body. Berwick, his face mirroring no emotion whatever, pulled the body clear of the wreck. Arms and legs flapped loosely. As Berwick attempted to fold the arms over the young airman's chest he saw that they were as pliant as the body of a snake as if entirely without bones. It seemed that every bone in that body had been broken, showing that the ship had hit the ground absolutely out of control.

"My God!" he heard Peters murmur, and as he glanced up he saw the young clerk sit down weakly.

The dead flyer's face was not badly mangled. He had apparently been very young. He was dressed in khaki shirt, breeches and canvas leggings, with blunt-toed army shoes.

Berwick stood looking at him for a moment, and then suddenly bent over. The clothing was badly smeared with crimson, but just under the armpit there seemed to be an unusual mass of clotted blood.

The flyer, on his knees, lifted the horribly limp body and peered down at the place where all that blood had come from. He dropped the body and got to his feet.

"There's a bullet hole under the arm—took him in the side, coming diagonally from the rear," he stated, utterly without excitement.

"Huh?" was Peters' startled exclamation.

"Well, I'll be ——," breathed the mechanic, as Peters bent to look.

Chatfield chewed on a blade of grass, his eyes wandering from the wreck.

Peters' rubicund face seemed older as he got to his feet.

"No doubt about it," he said, half to himself.

Chatfield silent and depressed, lounged slowly around the wreck, and then from it toward the fringe of trees on the opposite side of the clearing from which the rescue party had entered.

"There's footprints o' two men here," he stated slowly. "C'mere, Mr. Peters. Rest o' yuh too, if yuh want tuh."

Berwick, his mind swarming with questions and possibilities, held his peace as his eyes took in heavy bootmarks which were very dimly discernible in the dry loam, which was only sparsely grown to grass. All of them, eyes bent on the ground, slowly followed Chatfield's lead. The prints went around the wreck, and led to the undergrowth at the edge. The trail could be followed for a few yards, and then was lost. Chatfield, silent and leisurely and mournful, cast around for a few minutes, without success.

"There was two men here since the wreck, though," he stated as they emerged into the clearing. "See how they went round it?"

Peters gulped and wiped his shining forehead with a handkerchief.

"M-maybe they went for help 'stead o' carryin' him down themselves," he said.

The quiet Berwick wondered at the agitation obvious in the man's face. He was in a bad state, completely at variance with his former collected capability.

"Gentlemen," said the flyer, "that pilot was shot, and he was dead, of course, after he crashed—I hope before he crashed. Anyway, there would be no object in shooting him for any reason after he'd crashed. Therefore, it's reasonable to believe he was shot in the air. Easy for a good shot to do, riding in an airplane going at the same speed as the target. Inasmuch as there was another airplane in the vicinity, and the pilot had along with him a mountaineer carrying a rifle, they need investigating, to say the least.

"Mr. Jeff Calhoun may not have been in that ship, but he had a bruise on his head and from the looks of him I wouldn't be surprized if he had traces of oil-grime in his hair and on his forehead. Consequently, let's leave the body here temporarily, and make all haste back to Young's Gap and get those two fellows under arrest. It's simon-pure murder, gentlemen."

"Likewise, how did Jeff Calhoun git over hyar?" inquired Chatfield with deliberation. "Thirty miles from home, he is, an' ain't been seen till we seen him. I'd o' knowed if he was around hyar."

"Do any of you know whether this is one of the McCrann ships?" asked Berwick evenly.

"Yes, sir," the mechanic broke in. "Orange an' black. An' I think that's Allison, Mr. McCrann's pilot. I only saw him once——"

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"I see. Let's start. There isn't any time to waste."

Peters was like a man possessed. He had been pacing up and down, his round face lugubrious.

"Seems—seems to me like we ought to carry this poor feller with us—" he began, but Berwick cut in:

"It would be nice, but we can't help a dead man and we can get the man that probably murdered him. Why, in the name of Heaven, I don't know. Let's go."

Peters hung back, arguing. Berwick, his thin face sardonic and utterly unmoved, gazed at Peters speculatively.

"You're delaying us, Mr. Peters," he said suavely. "And possibly a few minutes will mean the difference between capture and freedom for men whom I firmly believe are cold-blooded murderers."

A note had crept into the quiet tones which made Peters glance at him quickly, and sudden menace come to a point in the faded blue eyes. Then he looked away.

"Pardon me—I—I am very much upset," he said.

"Reckon so," drawled Chatfield.

"Come on, Jim, I want to talk to you," said Peters quickly.

He plunged ahead, Chatfield keeping up without effort, and Berwick could see the little old man talking rapidly, although in tones so low they could not be overheard without getting much closer. The flyer was leading the other two men, following Peters and Chatfield's trail.

As he walked along he strove to sum up the peculiar facets to the situation as best he could. He forgot his weariness in swift retrospection and speculation.

What was the feud between Calhoun and Chatfield? And how did it happen that Peters seemed to exert authority over them? What had Calhoun said to Peters back there on the road to make the genial little man suddenly absent-minded and serious? Had the druggist-postmaster been prepared for what had been found on top of the mountain? Why was he so upset—acting for all the world as if partially responsible himself?

And yet, if he had been aware of the murder in advance why had he volunteered for the trip? Why should that poor youngster up there have been shot in the air? What was the meaning of those tracks around the wreck?

It was a tangle to which there seemed to be no key. One thing was certain, though; something sinister hung about the whole matter, entirely aside from the basic fact of one murdered man. Peters, Chatfield, Calhoun, Harley—in some obscure way they were bound together by some common tie, even though two of them were deadly enemies.

Berwick dropped back a trifle until he was within a few feet of the husky young mechanic, Smith.

"Mr. Smith, I wonder if you would be willing to take charge of a party to return after the body? I'll gladly be responsible for all expenses. I don't know the man from Adam, but I'm a friend of McCrann's. If you'll see to it that he's brought to Young's Gap I shall be very much obliged to you."

Smith, a broad-faced, stolid young man, had been treating Berwick with awed respect, and he eagerly agreed to be responsible for getting the body to Young's Gap.

Berwick, making sure that Peters and Chatfield were out of ear-shot, asked casually—

"Who is Jeff Calhoun, and what's the tiff between him and our friend Chatfield there?"

"Why—a—you know who Jeff Calhoun is, don't yuh?" asked Smith, patently at a loss. "Why I thought everybody——"

"You see this is my first journey to these parts," grinned Berwick, sliding and slipping down a steep fifteen-foot stretch of bare earth.

"That's right," grinned Smith. "I forgot. Why, he's the last o' the Calhouns—ever hear o' the Chatfield-Calhoun feud? They was in all the papers a few years back," he added proudly.

"There is something familiar about those names—I probably have," returned Berwick.

"The two families been fightin for nearly thirty years. Started over one o' Jed Chatfield's pigs goin' over in tuh Calhouns' garden right frequent. They killed each other off at the rate o' three or four a year until about two years or so ago Mr. Larkin, over in Brandley, kind o' got 'em together again. That is, he patched it up. I think both of 'em was workin' some way for Larkin—he's a big politician. Then, all of a sudden, it broke out again about two months ago some way. I hear it was something about moonshine, but I dunno. I

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ain't always lived here myself. Anyway, each of 'em allowed they'd shoot the other if he come over anywheres near. Calhoun lives about thirty miles away, over back o' Brandley, between there an' Whitefield."

"I see. They both seem to think quite a bit of Mr. Peters, don't they?"

"Yes, sir. You see Peters is kind o' Larkin's man in Young's Gap—Larkin made 'im postmaster, I guess. And Larkin's got Jim and Jeff out o' many a scrape, too, makin' 'em promise to be good for doin' it. They're the best shots in the county. Some say Jeff's better'n Jim, but I dunno. Wouldn't want neither one of 'em tuh draw a bead on me—not if I was a quarter of a mile away. I've seen Jim take a squirrel right in the eye many's the time."

"So Larkin is peacemaker, eh, and they're both his men even though they're enemies of each other, is that it?"

"Kind o', yes sir. They're both afraid o' Larkin—he's got lots on 'em and he's got 'em out o' jail for 'shinin' and killin's. Mr. Larkin was born in the mountains, but now he's the richest man in Poyet County an' lives in Brandley—that's the county seat, yuh know. He runs everything, mostly."

There was a long interval when all resources, physical and mental, were required to negotiate a safe passage down a hundred-foot cliff. Berwick, calmly going over the events of the day and getting into orderly semblance the facts he had to work on, reached one or two conclusions which might, or might not, be anywhere near the mark. One thing he could not explain in any manner whatsoever was the reason for the killing of the pilot. What obscure drama, coming to such a tragic climax in the depths of the mountains, had been played out with that mangled youngster on one side and the tall, murderous mountaineer on the other? He was certain that Jeff Calhoun was the man who had fired that shot, aided and abetted by Harley—

"Did you ever see the fellow who was flying that other plane?" he asked Smith.

"Nossir."

"None of the others seemed to know him, either, did they?"

"Nossir. Stranger. It's got Jim Chatfield wonderin'—I can see that."

Berwick, walking slightly behind Smith, treated himself to an unostentatious but complete scrutiny of his informant, wondering just how far to trust him. The hulking young fellow was not exactly prepossessing in his personal appearance, and yet his broad, homely face was the setting for a pair of steady eyes that awakened a certain amount of trust in Berwick's mind. The flyer had forgotten entirely that he was an outsider—he took it for granted that he would see the situation through. Even the fact that McCrann was involved was temporarily in the background—his unconscious reaction to the whole affair was that of a man who was himself involved, personally or professionally.

Berwick finally decided to feel out Smith as a possible ally.

"You were in the Army during the war, were you not?" he asked.

"Yes sir. 24th Infantry. Sergeant the last six months."

There was unmistakable pride in that last statement.

"I thought so. Smith, I don't want to get personal, but that kid laying up there on the mountain has got under my skin, and in addition the man who lost several thousand dollars by that murder is a friend of mine. I'm going to get to the bottom of this affair if I can, and I need help. As man to man—do you string closely with the political outfit? In small towns especially, sometimes a man has to look out for his bread and butter, to say nothing of his comfort, by kowtowing to the powers that be.

"In other words, do you want to lay low on this whole thing?"

Smith listened to Berwick's modulated, precise words without looking around, and then took a full minute to get his mental grinders working.

"Yuh mean would I be afraid to take a hand?" he asked slowly.

"Exactly. And I can't blame you if you don't want to."

"I married a Young's Gap girl, and I'm a good mechanic. I 'tend to my work, mind my own business, and don't ask nothin' from nobody. I can move on without starvin' to death."

"Then you wouldn't mind helping me out a bit?"

"No sir. I don't like what happened up yonder. An' I don't like Jeff Calhoun. O'course, old man Peters is different, but he ain't in it, I know. He may be scared he knows who is——"

"Well, here's what I'd like to have you do. When we get to the car we've got to

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make all the speed possible back to the Gap to make sure of nabbing these birds. When you come back to get the body, will you stop off at the other wrecked plane and get me the motor number, fuselage number, and any possible clue you might pick up as to the identity of the pilot? I mean any letter or article of personal wearing apparel or anything of that sort. None of this will be so necessary if we succeed in landing the two men there at the Gap, but if they won't talk it will be useful, and if they've slipped us it will be vitally necessary."

"Yes sir, I'll be glad to."

Berwick went on to explain where he would find the number plates on both motor and fuselage. He could get little more valuable information from Smith, who had apparently told all he knew. Finally they relapsed into silence as they neared the bottom of the mountain. Ahead Jim Chatfield was setting a cruel pace, and there was considerable more progress being made than when old man Peters had been leading. Chatfield was certainly acting like a man who wanted to ferret out the murderer—or Jeff Calhoun—and Peters was acting like a man who was very much afraid the murderer would be apprehended.

And yet Chatfield and Peters were in an allied cause. True, Chatfield hated Calhoun. But Larkin sounded both formidable and dangerous—what deep emotional reaction in the perpetually downcast mountaineer made him willing to brave Larkin, his power and knowledge, for the sake of catching Jeff Calhoun? Or was he braving Larkin? Peters' attitude indicated that there were forces at work which led beyond Young's Gap and Jeff Calhoun.

"The principal object of existence is to pass away the time," Berwick soliloquized. "It appears that West Virginia is one of the best places to pass it I ever saw."

VI

IT WAS a silent crew which occupied the Ford on the way back to Young's Gap. The sun had disappeared, but twilight had not yet set in. The western sky was blazing with the glory of the sunset, but the gorges between the mountains were beginning to darken with thickening shadows.

Peters had shown a sudden disposition to be very careful in his driving until Berwick had remarked softly:

"Mr. Peters, surely you aren't trying to give our friends ahead any more time than you've got to, are you? Your enthusiasm seems to have evaporated."

"What d' yuh mean?" snapped Peters, without turning his head.

"I was just wondering," was the easy reply.

In answer the old man stepped viciously on the accelerator. If ever there was a picture of uneasiness and distress it was the fatherly Peters bending over the steering wheel, gnawing his tobacco-stained white mustache.

"Between the devil and the deep blue sea, I guess," thought Berwick.

He wondered whether the two men would be found in Young's Gap. He figured that it had taken about three hours for the round trip up and down the mountain, and they should be in town within a half-hour. That would make close to four hours all told since they had met the mountaineer and the pilot. If they had walked all the way that would have taken two hours. It was possible they might not have left Young's Gap—depending, probably, on whether or not they believed that the rescue party would notice the fact that the pilot had been shot. They had two chances: That he was so badly mangled the bullet hole would be unnoticed, and that they would not be connected with the murder if it were noticed. There was a chance they might be found right in the village—if not, they could not be far away. Smith had said there was no train on the little branch-line which ran through the village—it would be a case of car or nothing, unless they plunged into the mountains.

Twilight was stealing down from the hills as they drove into the village. There was a curious crowd around the S. E. 5, to whom the lanky Zeke Peters was lecturing importantly.

Berwick slipped out of the car first.

"Mr. Peters, will you please inquire whether Calhoun and Harley are in town?"

"I will," said Chatfield, uncoiling and sliding out of the car like a lazy snake.

Peters sat still behind the wheel and wiped his forehead unhappily.

"Seems to me there's an awful lot o' trouble bein' took—" he began haltingly, and stopped as though he did not know how to finish the sentence.

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"For merely a murder," Berwick finished for him.

The natives had temporarily left off their inspection of the ship and had transferred their attention to the lounging Berwick.

A wave of them inundated Peters, Smith and the excited clerk, and questions flew thick and fast. Chatfield came weaving his way up to Berwick.

"They left here hour and a half ago fur Whitefield in one o' Sam Tuttle's cars—little feller named Gordon drivin' 'em. Whitefield's thirty-two mile——"

"Wait a minute," commanded Berwick.

He strode through the crowd and got his maps from the cock-pit. As he made his way back to the car he located Young's Gap, which was merely a speck on the map of the state, and then Whitefield. A quick estimate told him that the air-line to Whitefield was only about fifteen miles.

"How long would it take 'em to drive it?" he asked.

"An easy two hours, even drivin' fast," was the slow reply.

Peters and several others who had crowded near were listening closely.

"The road's a steep grade most o' the way up, and a lot o' bad curves," Chatfield went on.

"Take 'em nearer two and a half," Smith spoke up.

Berwick glanced at the sky and thought briefly. He made his decision without hesitation. The immediate object in life now was to get those two men.

"I'm going to fly over to Whitefield, get out a policeman or somebody, and get those birds," he stated. "Smith, will you help me run out the plane and then clear the road?"

In some uncanny way the cool Berwick usually got his way with a speed and precision. He lifted the tail-skid to his shoulder, and with Smith pushing on the radiator the little scout was trundled into the middle of the street.

In two quiet sentences Berwick told Smith how to handle the propeller:

"Spin it a couple of times and when I yell clear get away from it. There'll be no danger—it's a self-starter and I'll be slow with it."

He got into the cock-pit and turned on the gas from the gravity tank, made sure the switches were off, and nodded. The husky Smith spun the small propeller as if it had been a toothpick. The crowd was now back of the ship, and the sidewalks were filling with curious observers.

"Clear!" yelled Berwick, and Smith jumped to one side.

The flyer spun the starting magneto, and the engine started into humming life. He beckoned to Smith as he turned the pump-control to "motor-pump."

"Clear the street ahead, and then call up Chief of Police or whoever the law is over at Whitefield to nab those two if they get there before I do."

"You'll probably get there quicker'n my message," stated the mechanic, "but I'll do 'er, sir."

He started off up the roadway to warn any oncoming cars. Two owners who had their machines parked at the curb in front of the ship drove them out of danger. The main business section was mostly behind the ship, which was facing the direction from which it had landed.

Noting that the air-pressure was now registering three pounds Berwick switched the gas to the main tank, which was pressure-fed, and waited patiently. There were no blocks for the wheels, so all he could do was let the ship idle long enough to get the oil circulating and allow the motor to get a bit warmer than it was.

He waited impatiently, risking periodic jabs with the throttle, idling down again before the inertia of the ship was overcome. By this means he saw that the tight little engine was responding perfectly—gage-needles jumped instantly in answer to the sudden stimuli he applied with the throttle. The gas was getting low, but there was plenty to take him to Whitefield.

He wondered whether he would have any trouble finding the landing-field there. It was one of McCrann's ports of call, he knew. He looked around for some one he could ask as to the precise location of it—it would be nearly dark by the time he got there. Already shadows were lengthening ominously, although the sky was still bright.

He saw Peters using the telephone in his store—the booth was in plain sight through the small plate-glass window. The impatient pilot caught the eye of the bespectacled dry-goods clerk, who answered his beckoning finger eagerly.

"Where is the McCrann landing-field in Whitefield?" demanded Berwick.

"Right near Granner's Mill," returned the boy, grabbing at his necktie which was

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flapping in the light propeller wash. "It——"

"Is it east, west, north or south of town, and how far?"

"East, and only a mile from the square. You can't miss it."

"Thanks."

Berwick peered ahead. All was clear. Far down the street stood Smith, with three cars standing behind him, waiting.

With a gradual push he gave the S. E. the gun. Like a shot the tiny plane was flashing down the roadway, nose low to the ground.

BERWICK, with head over the side, and feet cocked on the rudder-bar, handled the ship with the accuracy and ease of long experience. Should it swerve at all, dozens of people would be mowed down by the wings—even the propeller. Their white faces flashed by, and then, with a world of excess speed, he lifted the ship into the air.

His eyes raised to the wires now. There was very little clearance there. He held the ship close the ground while he measured the clearance and then drew back on the stick. At a forty-five degree angle the plane shot upward and through the wires. No sooner was he clear than the stick went forward again, catching the S.E. before flying speed was lost. He turned eastward and, without throttling the motor put the ship in a steep climb, headed down the single-track branch railroad.

It was lighter up there than it had been on the ground, which was darkening fast under a blanket of purple. As the railroad curved northward to go around the mountain which barred the way, Berwick left it, sticking to the air line. The mountain might have been Old Baldy's twin—the two rose side by side, separated by a deep-cut gorge. The railroad wound around the mountain, going miles out of its way to find more gradual grades. The highway, gleaming white against the green forest, twisted and turned on itself, zig-zagging up the mountain side. It was easy to see how the air-line was a little less than half the distance by road.

For a while Berwick thought he was going to have to circle for altitude to get over the mountain, but finally decided he could make it. He seemed to be flying direct for the mountain side, but as he neared it the crest seemed to drop with every beat of the motor. Even so the tree-tops were less than five hundred feet below him as he cleared them, although the altimeter read twenty-five hundred feet.

As he cleared it and the panorama ahead spread before him, he saw that three smaller hills, all thickly wooded, lay between the mountain he had just cleared and another one, equally high, perhaps eight miles ahead. On the far side of it he should come in sight of Whitefield.

He glanced at the darkening sky, and was comforted with the assurance that it would not be actually dark before he arrived at his destination. He throttled the motor a trifle, noting that the thermometer was now a satisfactory eighty-seven centigrade. The hotter a motor the better it runs, up to the boiling point.

He looked down idly, knowing there would probably be no landing field but compelled to size up the terrane by the habit of years. As his eyes swept southward toward Old Baldy they rested on a dark blotch against the sky. He could not quite believe his eyes. He rubbed his goggles with the back of a glove and looked again.

"It's a ship, sure as shooting," he observed in astonishment. "Big one, too."

Then the probable explanation came to him. It was undoubtedly either McCrann or one of his pilots, out to look for the missing ship. Berwick banked quickly and sped toward the ever growing speck, which was flying on a course that would eventually intersect his own line of flight.

In three minutes they were close together. The other ship had orange wings and black fuselage—it was certainly one of McCrann's. Berwick swept behind him, straightened out, and with full-running motor overhauled it. By delicate handling of throttle and stick he slid up to within a few feet of it, and his eyes took in a huge figure in the front cockpit which was turning a well-remembered face toward him. It was McCrann himself, and he waved wildly with his free hand.

Berwick returned the salutation warily, having his hands full to keep his precarious position so close to his friend, and then banked away. He motioned wildly in an effort to make McCrann follow him, alternately pointing toward himself and then ahead to where Whitefield ought to be. He thought he saw the big Irishman nod. At

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any rate, there was no time to be lost, for he had a landing to make on a strange field, and the ravines below were already pools of impentrable darkness.

He saw that McCrann was following him, so he gave the scout full gun and sped eastward. He was high enough to spot the winking lights of a town nestling between the last foot-hill and the mountain ahead within a few minutes. Twilight was deepening, but there was still light enough to land. He nosed over to get extra speed, leaving the motor open, and the S.E. shot earthward in a long, gradual dive, its flat wires singing the peculiar song which is the individual property of that type of ship. A half-mile behind him McCrann was doing likewise.

"East of town, near a big mill," Berwick was repeating to himself. "Larry'll know it, of course, but I want all the light there is——"

He breathed a sigh of relief. Shining palely in the gloom was a big landing T. The first thing a real flyer does to a field is put a landing T on it, for purposes of identification and safety. The wind plays many a prank with kite-like airplanes.

Berwick was still fifteen hundred feet high, so he used the most expeditious method known of losing altitude swiftly. He nosed up, stalled, and threw on right rudder while he pulled the stick back all the way. The ship fell off to the right as he cut the motor. In a wild spin the scout screwed downward through the air, the flame of the exhaust pipes, now visible in the gloom, tracing thin crimson streamers in the air.

"Giving Whitefield a treat," Berwick remarked to himself as he shoved the stick forward and jammed on opposite rudder.

The ship straightened into a dive and then swooped out of it, five hundred feet high.

The mill was on the town-side of the field, with what was apparently a small fenced pasture between it and the field itself. The T was headed east, and that pasture made a fine open approach. There was a shed on the southern edge of the field, but otherwise it was entirely open on all sides.

Berwick strained his eyes for wires or any other obstruction as he spiraled down, directly over the center of town. At two hundred feet he was headed for the field, and directly below him was the square, evidently, for there was an open space, lined on all four sides with blazing store-windows. There was a band-stand or something of the sort, set in a small lawn, in the middle. And there were many people looking upward.

The flyer throttled gradually as he slid down toward the providential T which so clearly identified his destination. Fifty feet high he was compelled to use the motor for a moment to get across the last house, and then shut it off as he dropped over the pasture, cleared the shadowy fence by three feet, and settled to earth within fifty feet of the boundary. He trundled past the shed, half-expecting that some ridge or wash would turn him over, but the field seemed smooth. A man emerged from a lighted lean-to on the side of the shed nearest the field as Berwick turned his ship and taxied slowly toward the big structure.

McCrann was circling over town on his way down, and there was plenty of time to get out of his way.

The running figure resolved itself into that of a hatless youth who was chastely arrayed in trousers and undershirt, and whose feet were bare. He grabbed one wing-tip, and motioned toward one end of the shed, dragging on the wing as he did so to help turn the ship. Berwick helped with rudder and stick, and as McCrann's big ship, wires whining softly, swept down over the fence the scout was trundling along parallel with the shed.

Under the guidance of his helper Berwick taxied to within a few feet of the closed doors at one end, and then turned off the gas and ran out the motor. Having snapped off the switches, he leaped over the side of the cock-pit, felt around for his gun, and thrust it in his belt.

"That's McCrann coming in," he told the half-dressed and thoroughly astonished youth who had helped him. "I've got to hustle—you haven't got a car around here, have you?"

"N-no sir. 'Scuse me— I got to help Mr. McCrann."

He bolted off—his feet were evidently far from tender—and soon was guiding the other ship in. Berwick waited impatiently while McCrann silenced the motor.

"Hustle, Larry!" he yelled. "No time to lose! Say, where's the headquarters of the Law here, and what's the quickest way to get 'em? If we hustle we can nab the

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men who are responsible for the crash of your ship. You saw it, didn't you?"

Gigantic Larry McCrann waited not on the order of his going.

"C'mon, Roj," he said. "I get you. Take care of these ships, Dreyfuss."

The two flyers, Berwick following McCrann's lead, sped toward the road which ran past the field, behind the hangar. As luck would have it a car was approaching, headed toward town. McCrann stepped into the glare of the lights and held up his hand. As Berwick joined him he could see the flame dancing in the Irishman's gray eyes and the set of the generous mouth. McCrann was by no means calm.

As the car stopped he ran forward.

"Would you please take us to the chief's office?" he said, his deep bass sounding as though the courteous words were a command. "Very important."

"Sure, Mr. McCrann. Hop in."

"Is that you, Mr. Walsh? Thanks."

The two flyers sank in the back seat and the driver showed himself to be a man of perspicacity and acumen by speaking no word, but taking corners like a demon on wheels.

Berwick explained the situation in a few words. McCrann was in full possession of the essential facts as the car shot precariously through the square, followed by interested eyes from the sidewalks, and drew up before a two-story building set behind a one-story front. The windows of the main structure were barred, and the part of it fronting the street seemed small enough for a weather-door to the main structure.

Berwick followed McCrann in, and the driver brought up the rear. As they entered a small roughly-dressed man burst out of the door, climbed in a flivver at the curb, and disappeared amid a volley of assorted pops and wheezes.

A SHORT, squat man wearing a blue hat with "Chief of Police" on its front in ornate gold characters was hanging up the phone as they entered.

"My name is McCrann, chief. I've met you before though perhaps you don't remember me," Larry began without preamble. "Did you get a telephone call from Mr. Smith, of Young's Gap, regarding two criminals on their way here by car?"

"Not a word. What's the matter?"

"Probably couldn't get a wire through, then."

Huge and awkward, the flyer leaned across the desk and glared down into the chief's full moon of a face. The policeman had unbuttoned his uniform coat for comfort's sake, and was smoking a pipe which he had picked up after finishing at the phone. Larry seemed to be endeavoring to collect himself—it was at a time like this that his underlying physical weakness showed.

"Well, what can I do for you, Mr. McCrann?" the chief asked calmly, giving the big Irishman the briefest of glances from puffy eyes.

"Jeff Calhoun and a fellow named Harley are on their way here from Young's Gap in a car. I have circumstantial evidence of the strongest kind that they are responsible for the murder of Sandy Allison, one of my men, found murdered on Old Baldy this afternoon. They left Young's Gap two hours ago. By hustling out to the Young's Gap road they can be nabbed unless they made a world's record over that road."

McCrann's rumbling voice uttered the words in a torrent. Bending low over the high desk, he seemed to be fairly quivering in an effort to calm himself and yet lose no second of time.

The chief was maddening in his deliberation. Berwick wondered at his lack of surprize. The news of the crime might have been a remark about the weather for all the sensation it had created in the chunky officer's life. A tall, superbly built young policeman entered from the rear of the office before the chief said a word.

The new arrival leaned against the wall, waiting silently to find out what was in the wind. McCrann, every line of his heavy body and dark face expressing barely controlled impatience, was still leaning over the desk, his hands twitching slightly. Berwick smoked as if entirely uninterested in the whole affair. The man who had driven them from the field was polishing his glasses nervously, his eyes squinting from face to face with eager curiosity.

The chief looked at him—he did not seem to like the idea of meeting McCrann's flaming eyes.

"Good evening, Mr. Walsh," he said with some respect. "Seems we have a murder on our hands, eh? Just what were the circumstances, Mr. McCrann?"

"Great God, the murderers will escape, I tell you!" Larry bellowed, one ham-like

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fist hitting the desk with a heavy thud. "I'll talk 'till I'm blue in the face afterward; but chief, they're about here now. Can't we get 'em and then——"

"False arrest's a very serious——"

"Poppycock!" said an incisive voice, emanating from none other than Mr. Walsh.

He was a short, slight, neutral-looking little man, with a thin nose, tiny, closely clipped mustache, and needle-like eyes under heavy eyebrows. His forehead was high and thin, and his brown hair was getting scarce in front.

Berwick treated himself to a slight smile as the Whitefield man cut in. He deemed it best to stay in the background.

"Er—what?" stammered the chief, moving his squat body uncomfortably.

"Poppycock!" repeated Walsh, adjusting his nose-glasses on his nose and pulling his soft hat down over his eyes. "When a reliable citizen comes in this office to give information whereby with prompt action you can get two probable murderers it is your business to act first and investigate afterward, sir!"

The chief's little eyes glowed redly for a minute. Berwick wondered; would he crawl or would he argue.

He crawled.

"I was just trying to be sure, Mr. Walsh," he said pacifically, getting to his feet with remarkable ease in such a clumsy-appearing a man. "I didn't quite understand the need for hurry. George, get a car and get out on the Young's Gap road——"

"I'll take him myself," stated Walsh. "But do you think one man can get Jeff Calhoun and an accomplice?"

"Pick up Jerry on his beat," ordered the chief, fingering his cap uncomfortably.

"We'll go along, if you don't mind," said McCrann, thereby beating Berwick to the words by a split-second.

"Sure," said Walsh briskly, but the chief did not seem to like the idea.

"I don't know—ain't exactly right to meddle in a thing like this—yuh might git in trouble——"

"Fiddlesticks, Macy! The more the better."

It was Walsh again.

"Well, let's go," suggested Berwick, and started forthwith for the door.

"I ain't told George here—" started the chief, but McCrann interrupted.

"We'll tell George more in five seconds than you would in an hour!" he blazed, all the pent-up impatience in him coming to the surface.

"See here, sir, do you know who you're talking to?" grated Chief of Police Macy, but McCrann was half-way across the sidewalk.

The laden car left behind it an officer whose forehead bore beads of sweat, and who sank in his chair and tapped his desk with his fingers in uncontrollable nervousness.

"—— the luck!" he whispered, and then relaxed into silence, waiting.

Having picked up the other policeman on his beat, Walsh settled down to make time while Berwick explained the object of the chase in terse, incisive words.

"They told me it was a big Roamobile car—old model—and I'll know the men——"

"I know the car, too," stated the young officer who had been in the office with them, and whom the chief had called George.

He was a red-faced, stalwart young giant whose frank countenance caused Berwick to wonder whether he and the chief pulled together. The procrastinating Macy seemed to be conducting this affair on the Peters model. The second policeman was an older man, whose weatherbeaten face was far from prepossessing.

In a few moments the houses had thinned out until there was practically nothing but open country on either side of the road.

"We'll get beyond the cross-road and then wait," Walsh flung over his shoulder.

Scarcely had they drawn up alongside the road when two headlights, like eyes of some monster of the night, blazed suddenly toward the base of the mountain. For a moment they were headed straight for the waiting group, and then swung to one side as the car followed the winding road.

"How're you going to get 'em?" demanded Berwick. "From what I hear, this Jeff Calhoun is a mean man to handle."

"The most desperate character in all these mountains, and that means something," Walsh declared. "He ought to be in jail for life. Between the Chatfield-Calhoun feud and other things he's killed ten men if he has one."

"Why not do this?" McCrann put in. "Turn the car to face back toward town. When the Roamobile comes follow it into town and then draw alongside and cover

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em. They wouldn't dare shoot, being in the middle of town like that, and in addition we'll have the advantage of the drop on them. If they swing off and don't make for town——"

"Which will be what they'll do," commented Walsh.

"—we can draw alongside and cover 'em anyway. Standing in the road and stopping the car might be suicide for the man that did it."

The suggestion was adopted, and the car turned around just as the headlights of the oncoming car, which might be the Roamobile, glared again as a turn faced the lights directly toward town. That car was still a mile or more away, and had not yet turned into the straight stretch of highway which led to the base of the mountain.

"There's one thing bothering me, Larry," remarked Berwick as the party relaxed for a moment and cigarets were produced." "What was the object of the murder? And where did the other airplane come from?"

"I can give you some dope on that, maybe," was the grim reply of McCrann.

In the quick light of the match, with which he was igniting one of Berwick's cigarets, his broad, dark face, bearing the imprint of his race in the snub nose, long upper lip and pugnacious jaw, was curiously sinister. There was none of the geniality and boyishness there which Berwick knew so well.

Walsh turned in the front seat, as if waiting for McCrann to speak. The two policemen waited silently.

"I guess it had better wait, though," McCrann went on as he extinguished the match.

Berwick comprehended, or thought he did, immediately. If Macy, and Peters likewise, were acting in a somewhat remarkable manner, was it not within the bounds of probability that one or both of the policemen might bear watching?

"It's —— to catch a murderer and fight the law at the same time," reflected Berwick as he glanced back over the road. Then aloud:

"Here comes that car, gents. Might be a good thing to start the motor, Mr. Walsh. What do you think?"

"Right-o," was the cheery response, and the motor began turning over quietly.

The approaching car was traveling at fairly good speed, around thirty miles an hour, but the younger of the two officers nodded when it was still a hundred yards away.

"That's our meat!" he exclaimed, and Walsh let in the clutch as the car whizzed by.

Berwick, watching closely, swore feelingly.

"There's no one in it but the driver!" he told them.

"The —— you say!" grated McCrann. "Let's catch it right now, Mr. Walsh!"

It was caught within five hundred yards. Walsh drew abreast of it and the man known as Jerry leaned out so that his uniform could be plainly seen and motioned the car to a halt. The order was obeyed immediately, the brakes squealing a protest as the big Young's Gap taxi ground to a stop.

All five of them poured out and surrounded the white-shirted youth in a cap who was driving.

"Where'd Jeff Calhoun and that other fellow with him go?" Berwick demanded.

"They got off half-way up the mountain —near the old Valley trail," stammered the youth. "Frank Fosset stopped me and said somethin' to 'em——"

"Is Fosset a little fellow, wearing a vest, no coat, soft hat and driving a Ford?"

"Yes sir."

Berwick turned to the others:

"That's the fellow that came out of the chief's office just as we came in," he remarked easily. "Must be the telephone was working from Young's Gap, I guess, and——"

"Sh-h-h-h," said McCrann, gripping Berwick's arm. "We'll talk about that later. Where did Fosset go—on to Young's Gap?"

"No, sir. There was a feller with him in the car, and Fosset went with Jeff and that airplane feller and this other feller drove the car on."

"Who's Fosset?" queried Berwick, leaning restfully against the side of the car.

"Farmer, by name, and moonshiner by profession. Lives back here a few miles," Walsh told him.

Berwick turned to the policemen, who had been listening, apparently at a loss what to do.

"What about this fellow? Do you want him as a witness or anything? Who is he?"

"I ain't done nothin'!" whined the chauffeur in a panic of fear. "You know me, George! I ain'——"

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"He's all right," granted George judicially. "I know his father—"

"They jest come up and hired me to take 'em to Whitesville. I don't know what they done, honest. They come intuh Young's Gap—"

"Well, I guess the dastards have foiled us again and our Nell is still in danger," remarked Berwick. "Calhoun and the others are roaming at large in yonder mountain, and I for one don't want to chase 'em tonight. I suppose, officer, that word will be sent all over to be on the look-out?"

"Yes, sir."

"Jeff's gone right home, and the others with 'em," declared Walsh. "And boys, it's going to be some job to get them. He knows every foot of these mountains—a company of militia, I firmly believe, would fail and lose half their men besides. But maybe something can be done."

"Well, let's go back and get some supper and talk things over," rumbled McCrann. "Mr. Walsh, would you mind giving us a little advice? Things have come to a show-down, I guess, and I'd like to talk with you about it."

Peppery little Walsh glanced keenly at the big airman, and nodded.

"Anything more you want to do, gentlemen?" he inquired.

"We'll just take Gordon here back to the station and let the chief question him a little. This is one o' Tuttle's cars, and Gordon is nothin' but a chauffeur," said the younger policeman, and the taciturn, lowering Jerry nodded agreement.

Berwick sank back in Walsh's car with a sigh.

"I'm dirty and tired and hungry, Larry. I started out from St. Louis this morning for a change of scene, and I'll say I'm getting it!"

VIII

AS THEY drove through the square it was obvious that rumor had preceded them. Excited knots of people on the streets were discussing the vague hints of murder which had already spread through the town in the uncanny way which extraordinary news has of doing. They were recognized speedily, and there was a concerted movement toward the hotel on the part of several dozen men who had been airing their views on the street corners. Reports varied from a total of eight men killed in an outbreak of the Chatfield-Calhoun feud to positive statements that a strange aviator had lodged both Calhoun and Chatfield in jail for the murder of one of McCrann's flyers.

Walsh, Larry and Berwick entered the hotel through a double line of curious people, many of whom hailed Walsh eagerly, hoping for information and glad to bask in the reflected glory of intimate acquaintance with any one in the limelight.

Whitefield seemed to be a town of several thousand people, Berwick estimated, and the evening crowd was about evenly divided between townsfolk of the regulation small-town brand, to dressed-up miners and their families who were evidently in town for shopping purposes. A large number of stores were open, although it was after six o'clock.

The dingy lobby was well filled with buzzing men who fell silent as the three came in. Both McCrann and Berwick were oil-grimed and dirty, and carried helmets and goggles in their hands. Walsh knew most of the men, apparently, and McCrann himself a few of them. Walsh interviewed the very respectful clerk, who was a gray-haired man with a pair of spectacles perched on the extreme tip of his nose.

"Two connecting rooms right across the hall from a bathroom," Walsh demanded, and the order was filled without delay.

"How about supper up-stairs?" queried Berwick. "I'm somewhat mussed up, and have no other clothes with me."

"You're not in the Ritz," Walsh cackled. "You won't be conspicuous, and this hostelry hasn't served a meal outside of the dining-room since Grover Cleveland was sick here. Listen, gentlemen: I've got to run home for supper—how'll it be if I meet you up-stairs in about three-quarters of an hour?"

"Fine. I hate to bother you, Mr. Walsh, but——"

"Bother me! I'm feeling ten years younger already," interrupted the cocky little West Virginian. "Does me good to stir my liver up. I'm curious as a woman about what's up, and I'll hustle back on the double-quick."

He strode out briskly, waving off eager inquiries with impatient gestures.

"While you're making that phone call to your wife I'm going to hie me forth and

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procure a tooth-brush," said Berwick. "I haven't even a toilet kit with me."

"All right, see you up-stairs," returned McCrann absently.

His heavy black eyebrows were drawn down over his eyes, and in every word and gesture there was the impression of restrained impatience. As he made for the telephone Berwick's eyes followed him a moment.

"Larry's pining for something he can get those two paws of his on," he reflected. "The Army may think that big gazabo is a cripple, but I'd hate to have him on my tail this minute!"

He strolled out of the hotel and down the street a half-block to a large and brilliantly lighted store which sported a "Drugs" sign in electric lights. In boots and breeches his slimness was accentuated, and due partly to weariness and partly to habit his walk was extremely slouchy and languid. The helmet which had covered his head for so many hours had left his glossy black hair, parted meticulously in the middle, slicked down in perfect smoothness.

His abstraction and utter unconsciousness of being a center of interest for the thronged street were not assumed. His mind was busy with the happenings of the day, and he was trying to get some idea of what might be back of the strange events with which he had so suddenly become connected. It was characteristic of his mental processes that his own share in the affair, either past or future, did not cut any figure in his thoughts. He was ever the bystander, thinking without personal prejudice and utterly unaffected by any probabilities or possibilities affecting him individually.

That Larry McCrann was involved gave an additional impulse to his interest, but he thought of the whole matter as he might have had he been nothing but an onlooker, who was affected in no way himself. His was ever an impersonal slant at matters with which he was connected, and if he had a share in them he seemed to have a second self on the sidelines, looking on from that point of vantage rather than from the confused center of conflict.

It had been a saying in the old 313th that if informed on positive authority that the world was coming to an end in five minutes Berwick would say:

"You don't say! Let's have another smoke before the horrible disaster."

He was so deeply immersed in thought that he did not notice the stout man who burst out of the drug-store door just as Berwick himself was crossing the side-street toward it. The man hurried toward him, hand outstretched.

"Greetings, Mr. Berwick! Well, well, I was just starting after you. When I heard all the wild stories about I had an idea that you might be the man."

"How do you do, Dr. Gray! This is a pleasant surprize!" returned Berwick smilingly. "I thought your home pasture was Brandley."

"It is, but one of my hospitals is here and I had an operation this afternoon. Well, well, I'm glad to see you. You've certainly got this town by the ears."

He gestured with one pudgy arm at the curious groups of people who were loitering near by, not quite daring to get near enough to overhear the conversation, but nevertheless palpably interested.

Dr. Gray was in a well-cut tweed business suit and pearl-gray hat, and looked more like a successful city business man than a country doctor. His jovial countenance radiated pleasure at seeing Berwick. He removed his glasses and polished them as he said:

"You're at the hotel, I presume. I was on my way over there to see what all this to do is about as well as have the pleasure of seeing you again. Had dinner yet? I'm at the hotel myself, and it's time to stoke up."

"No, I haven't. I was about to buy a tooth-brush and then go back and eat. Larry McCrann is there. I've stumbled on some queer things, Dr. Gray, and although I don't yet know quite what it's all about Larry has an idea, and right after dinner he and I and a Mr. Walsh of this town—who seems to be a good sort of a person to tie to—were going to get together and thrash things out. I presume you know that one of Larry McCrann's pilots, a kid named Allison, was murdered this afternoon—shot while he was in the air, by a man in another airplane. And it seems that the famous gent named Jeff Calhoun is the murderer."

Dr. Gray replaced his spectacles carefully. His rubicund face was serious. He nodded.

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"I see. Maybe I can be of some service," he said rather more slowly than was his wont. "It may be the time has come when this county has got to do some cleaning up which ought to have been done years ago. I have an idea about what McCrann will say—just heard it, as you might say, since I returned from St. Louis. But let's forget all that for a while—as a physician I must insist on our eating with free minds! Come on, son, and we'll get your tooth-brush."

He led Berwick into the store and hailed a young woman in spotless white.

"Grace, meet Mr. Berwick. This is Miss Kay, Berwick, who sooner or later is going to be one of my nurses. Grace, get Mr. Berwick a tooth-brush. What specifications, Berwick?"

Berwick announced them and was soon the possessor of one of those useful articles. When he went to pay for it Gray waved him away.

"Tell Bill that I'll allow him to be fifty cents off on his inventory, Grace," he said, and led the way out.

"I own three drug stores in the same three towns that boast of the hospitals," he told Berwick as they started for the hotel. "Started one because it was the only way I could get what I wanted, and it made so much money I was bound to have more. I enjoy a taste of business—gives me a lot of fun."

McCrann was waiting in the lobby. He and Dr. Gray shook hands, the big Irishman glancing at Berwick with amazement at his familiarity with the physician. On the way up-stairs Dr. Gray told a somewhat exaggerated yarn of their meeting in St. Louis.

At dinner in the small dining-room Gray did most of the talking, and very interesting chatter it was. It seemed as if he was purposely monopolizing the conversation, and gradually the brooding McCrann's face lightened and his rumbling laugh rang out in its old-time unctuousness.

Walsh found them as they were partaking of villainous apple-pie and amazingly good coffee, and consented to have a cup of the comforting beverage with them. Dr. Gray insisted on telling him how he had met Berwick through the intervention of five turkey gobblers with beaver hats and green neckties. He and Walsh were apparently well acquainted, calling each other by their first names.

Walsh, it seemed, was a lawyer, and was local representative of one of the large coal operators, who owned three mines in the vicinity of Whitefield and Brandley.

"Tom and I fight over my contract every year regularly," Gray told the flyers. "He's a terrible skinflint, Tom is."

The sprightly physician seemed to be enjoying himself immensely, and through his efforts the tenseness which was apparent in the faces of Walsh and McCrann relaxed, and even Berwick felt refreshed for having forgotten the mental picture of that murdered pilot for an interval.

Dinner over they adjourned to their rooms, which were exact twins, each furnished chastely with a lumpy bed, aged wash-stand proudly bearing bowl and pitcher, small table covered with a towel, and one straight chair.

"Neat, but not gaudy," commented Berwick. "Well, Larry, let's get the low-down on this thing."

Dr. Gray seated himself on the bed and removed his glasses.

"Suppose, for the sake of us all, we begin at the beginning and get all the facts straight in our minds," he said. "Excuse me for intruding, Mr. McCrann, but as a citizen of this county, with considerable business and personal interests here, I am concerned over this matter in many ways. It is my opinion that the time has come to get Poyet County out of its swaddling clothes. I may be wrong, but I have learned recently that you, Mr. McCrann, may prove to be the unconscious cause of accomplishing some things that many of us have been wanting to do for a long time. We may be able to be of some service to you—I hope so."

Dr. Gray's words were cryptic to Berwick, but there was one thing certain—the very presence of the genial doctor was a source of comfort, and in his words and attitude there was an effect of quiet competence. He was a powerful ally, entirely aside from his professional standing, Berwick decided. The flyer had been aware of the instinctive feeling that there were far-reaching forces of sinister power behind the tragic events of the day, and in the presence of it, marooned there in the mountains, he had been conscious of a curious feeling of helplessness. With Dr. Gray on the job that feeling disappeared.

Walsh shared the bed with Gray, and

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McCrann ensconced his massive body on the creaking chair. Berwick lounged against the wall, and told his story carefully; how he had seen the two wrecks, how Peters and the others had volunteered their help in Young's Gap and of the meeting with Calhoun and Harley, the pilot.

When he told of the change in Peters' attitude after that short conversation with Calhoun, and the open hostility between Chatfield and the other mountaineer, Gray nodded vigorously at Walsh, and Larry's eyes began to glow strangely. It was all the big Irishman could do to refrain from injecting himself into the tale at that point.

Berwick went on to describe what had happened in the police station, and the chief's peculiar attitude. The warning of Calhoun and Harley by Fossett brought more nods from the chubby physician, who puffed at his cigar rapidly and seemed hard put to it to keep silent himself.

"I'm in the dark about the underground currents which are evidently apparent to you gentlemen," Berwick concluded, "but, just as an outside observer, it seems plain to me that the murder was planned carefully, in the first place; that it was committed by Jeff Calhoun, aided by Harley, in the second place; that Peters is a man having some influence over those two feudists, but that in turn Calhoun has some power over Peters, or what he said would not have been so effective; that your police force here is under the same thumb as Peters appears to be; and lastly, that Jim Chatfield, although evidently tied up with this mysterious gang in some way, seems to want to help land Calhoun, thereby showing a different attitude than his betters. Probably the personal feud has broken out forcefully enough to account for that. Now I'm waiting with my ears buttoned back to get the dope on the power behind the throne, so to speak, and the motive for all this."

His voice had scarcely ceased when McCrann got to his feet as if physically unable to remain quiet any longer.

"I can chip in with quite a slice of information," he said, his deep, bass voice grim and the words spoken slowly. "In the first place, up to a few minutes before the start of the trip, I was supposed to go instead of poor Sandy Allison, and in the next place there was supposed to be thirty-two thousand dollars in cash in that ship, although that was not common knowledge."

Dr. Gray's eyes blazed suddenly behind his glasses, and Walsh leaped to his feet like a startled bird.

"You don't say!" he burst out, his voice cracking with excitement.

Berwick waited quietly for McCrann to go on.

"We were supposed to get the pay-roll over to the Black Beauty mine," McCrann went on. "Mr. Gillet, the superintendent, phoned me that through some mistake the pay-roll had not been sent from Brandley by express, and that inasmuch as tomorrow is Saturday and a half-holiday, and there was no other train until late afternoon Saturday, there was no chance to get the money in except by automobile. They don't like that—too much chance of robbery. I was to drop the money to them—it's only a thirty-minute flight from Brandley, and they were to have plenty of guards around the mine yard to get the package. As Roj here knows, by getting very low it is a cinch to drop anything that is fairly heavy for its size within a fifty-yard circle.

"At the last minute the superintendent called up again and said that by a fortunate chance the little country bank at Knapp's Center—that's a village about ten miles from the mine, Roj—happened to have an unusual amount of cash on hand and could supply the cash. I was to get a draft, or whatever the official paper is called, from the Miners' and Merchants' Bank in Brandley, which is the bank the Black Beauty people do business with, and bring this draft to Knapp's Center, where there is a field we've landed on before. It is my idea that the money matter was fixed up by phone all right, and that the mine simply gave me the commission to deliver the draft to compensate me for my trouble—I was to get fifty bucks for delivering the money, and the same for the draft.

"I sent Sandy Allison with the draft, instead of going myself. I'm sitting here right now because my wife wanted me to get the lawn mowed!"

THE tender-hearted Irishman was plainly moved by the death of his pilot, and Berwick noticed the sudden clenching of his hands as he said the last words. McCrann's dark, broad face was unusually attractive, although far

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from handsome—the irrepressible personality of his race lightened what would otherwise have been heaviness. It was difficult to conceive of him as a man who had been ordered into the open for his life. His legs were massive and trunk-like, supporting a thick, powerful body. He towered giant-like in the small room as he stood with one foot on his chair and his face set in lines of deadly seriousness. There was nothing facile or brilliant about McCrann, but he was a plodder who eventually came very near attaining any given objective.

No one broke the momentary silence as McCrann stared into nothingness for a moment. He raised his head and went on:

"It's a cinch that no Jeff Calhoun, nor any strange pilot, ever got wind of the proposed aerial transportation of the money, and that they did not plan the robbery, and murder, themselves. There's something back of it. I may have some light there too, gentlemen.

"In the first place, I got a letter day before yesterday, mailed in Canberry. It was unsigned, and it warned me to get out of Brandley and Poyet County immediately if not sooner, under penalty of what the letter called 'steps which would make me wish I had done so.' It was typewritten on a sheet of plain white paper."

"Well I'll be ——!" exclaimed Walsh excitedly, and the doctor sought his usual outlet for emotion in polishing his glasses.

"Now as to any reason for sending such a letter," Larry continued ponderously, plainly making every effort to formulate his story and tell it in logical sequence: "There is absolutely nothing personal I can think of. I have had no trouble with any one, and I think I may say that my relations with people of standing in Brandley, and somewhat in Whitefield and Canberry, have been very pleasant. I don't think I stand so low——"

"Out of the question," interrupted Gray succinctly, and Walsh's head bobbed in agreement until the thin hair was shaken out of its careful arrangement whereby each hair covered the maximum acreage of scalp.

"Furthermore, I have had no dealings with any other class except laborers who have done their work and been paid their money. So, to my mind, there is only one possibility. If you and Mr. Walsh will pardon me, doctor, I'll explain to Roj the lay of the land in detail so he'll know as much about it as any of us."

They nodded, and on the back of an envelope McCrann rapidly sketched this map:

"Here's the lay, Roj," he explained, holding the crude drawing so they could all see. "Brandley is on the main line of the railroad; here's Whitefield, on the branch line, and Canberry—the three principal towns of Poyet County, all sizeable, and fed by numerous mines. Brandley is the county seat. From Brandley to Whitefield here is nearly forty miles by road—and less than twenty air-line. From Canberry to Brandley is about the same. Now to get to Whitefield here on the train you've got to change at Canberry, see? And that little branch line to Canberry is a two-for-a-cent thing to begin with—runs infrequently and unreliably.

"In other words, traffic between these towns in mainly by road over the mountains. The roads are some of them twelve-feet-wide concrete highways, with stretches in them, particularly this one from Brandley to Whitefield, which are unfinished. If you've never ridden over these roads you can't appreciate what it is to be driving on the rim of a thousand-foot cliff with a continuous procession of cars to pass and a lot of wild drivers. The deaths in Poyet County accidents last year were something over fifty, and the wrecks in the hundreds.

"The doctors said to get into the mountains, as you know Roj, and Mary has an aunt in Brandley, so we decided to look around here. Right away I saw a chance for planes, and when I found out that I could get landing-fields in all three towns I was sure of it. I had a few thousand—I hope this doesn't bore you gentlemen, it's necessary."

Dr. Gray snorted impatiently.

"I know what you're getting at. Go to it, son," he admonished.

"I had a few thousand," McCrann resumed, "and I was willing to gamble on my scheme for the sake of having something interesting to keep me busy during the three or four years I had ahead of me up here in the wilderness. To make a long story short I got a couple of 'Jennys' to start on, rented and prepared a field in each of the three towns, and got Sandy Allison to help me. He comes from Boston, too, and I've known him a long time. He was a cadet just

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about to finish his training when the armistice was signed.

"For a while we just carried passengers—got along fairly well because I succeeded in getting the facts about flying in front of the people. I hammered away at 'em that my fields were so fixed that there was no danger on the take-off, that the ship was always within gliding distance of the field, and that with the forced landing for motor trouble hazard out of the way, flying was fully as safe as automobile riding. No more danger of a wing coming off than a tire—that stuff.

"We began doing well, and so far I was all right. Then I got the idea I'm working now in a small way, and that brain-storm of mine resulted in treading on the toes of some of the powers that be, and I firmly believe is responsible for Sandy being dead this minute. It was simply to enlarge the passenger carrying business so that people would travel between the three towns by plane. I'd already got 'em educated, you see, and some men like Mr. Walsh here had used one of my planes to do business in all three towns, getting it over in one morning. But it was largely a lark and business combined, you see?

"That's when I borrowed the five thousand, Roj, and got hold of two of those Verner V-4's I'd run across advertised in *The Pioneer*. They carry three people besides pilot and a couple of hundred pounds of baggage. Then I rented a couple of clearings in strategic places and had 'em fixed into fair emergency landing-fields. When I got that done, Roj, I could truthfully advertise that my planes, flying at five thousand feet, were never out of gliding distance of a landing-field and were the most carefully cared for ships in the country, and that's no lie.

"Well, it took. I took on another pilot, and between passenger carrying and transportation between towns I was—still am—doing fine. I can afford to take a party of three, swing 'em into all three towns, and deliver 'em back in three hours for fifteen bucks apiece. Saves busy men hours of dangerous driving, and gives 'em a thrill. You'd be amazed, Roj, the way it's taken hold. Why, I've taken up dozens of kids with their folks looking on without a quiver, and up to today there hasn't been an accident.

"A couple of weeks ago I decided to start a regular schedule affair, adding another ship, and to free the 'Jennys' for passenger carrying at fairs. I've got a concession for seven county fairs, too. Then I've been doing a lot of emergency work like delivering express—I can carry a thousand pounds at a time—and some work with the State Police. This is important, too. I believe it is pretty common knowledge that the State Police in this section are about to get a special arrangement made whereby they are authorized to use me—at suitable prices—for running down some of the bad eggs that have been running wild in these mountains long enough.

"Having got all that off my chest, I can get down to brass tacks now. I mean Larkin."

McCrann stopped and took out a short, brier pipe, which he methodically filled, tamped, and lighted.

"Exactly!" exploded Dr. Gray, nodding in deep satisfaction.

Walsh's thin, nervous countenance was fairly ablaze. He seemed in such a state of nervous excitement that he was in momentary danger of exploding. He was evidently getting an angle on matters in Poyet County which astonished him greatly. Berwick was beginning to see light ahead, too, and gradually his smooth-working mind was putting enough of the pieces of the puzzle in place to get some idea what the completed mosaic would look like.

"I guess both of you native sons know a lot more about Larkin than I do—" McCrann resumed, having shifted the other leg on the chair. He rested one elbow on the raised knee and the stubby pipe was completely hidden in the palm of his hand—"but what I know is enough to make me suspicious. I hope I'm not treading on anybody's toes, but the facts are these: Larkin is owner and operator of the Poyet Transportation Company, Roj, that operates all the public taxis in the three towns, operates a fleet of trucks which haul freight and express and anything else between the three towns, and runs a regular schedule of buses between them. You see, trucks and cars have an advantage over rail transportation in this section, considering time and trouble, with very little higher prices involved. I've got it on him, because I can go from town to town in fifteen minutes, average. Of course, the air is much more expensive.

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"Well, disregarding his bootleg operations and other things, Larkin, who is political boss of the county, had forced out all competition and had a gold mine. I was cutting into his profits some, and when my idea of regular scheduled transportation, both passenger and freight-carrying, came out he made me an offer to buy me out. I learned that he had tried to get some fair concessions for passenger carrying, too, only to find that I had been ahead of him. When I refused his offer he said things that might be construed as vague threats.

"My idea about why he tried to buy me out is this: In the first place my profits would seem a great deal bigger, net, to an outsider than they really were. In the second place, there's no question that I'd be stepping on Larkin's toes to the tune of several hundred a month on my scheme. In the third place Larkin, who in addition to being political boss of the county is sheriff——"

Berwick threw back his hand and laughed. The others looked at him surprizedly.

"Excuse me," grinned the city man. "But the way the soup is thickening right before my eyes, and the tight little combine up here in the hills, just naturally tickle me. Proceed, Larry."

It was almost startling to note the difference in Berwick made by a smile or an actual laugh. In repose, and in ordinary conversation, he seemed reserved, aloof, even cold. But in his mirth there could be seen an outbreak of the spirit within him, as if the outer shell had momentarily cracked and given a glimpse of the real warmth and zestful spirit of him.

McCrann deigned to lighten the deadly seriousness of his face for a moment, and the gray eyes glowed affectionately.

"Glad I got a rise out of you, Roj," he remarked, and then went on: "Well, as I said, Larkin's sheriff, and has always had funny relationships with the mountaineers of the county. I've got an idea that he doesn't want to have any one know too much about what goes on back in the woods. Maybe you two native sons know something about that. Anyway, the idea of me cooperating with the State Police, perhaps even becoming a sort of ex-officio trooper myself, didn't sit well with him. If it had to be done, he'd like to be in charge, I figure.

"There's no question that the airplane is the secret of law enforcement in the backwoods of the Cumberlands, gentlemen. All over this country everybody that reads knows that for generations the mountaineers of West Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee, not to speak of the Carolinas, have been a law to themselves and laughed at everybody else because they had thousands of square miles of wilderness to range in, and the law was helpless.

"There's one dead cinch: The day that airplanes start spotting stills, guiding searchers after fugitives, and that sort of stuff, that day thugs like Jeff Calhoun are going to start leading a tough life. And Larkin knows it, and he knows that's what may happen right soon, now, if the State Troopers have their way. And I may be wrong, but its my idea that hurting Jeff Calhoun and his like will get a yell or two of pain out of none other than Obadiah P. Larkin! If that be treason, make the most of it!" he concluded, knocking out his pipe viciously.

"Well, well, between us all we're going to have something to go on," stated Doctor Gray happily. His face beamed smilingly for a moment, and then relapsed into serious lines. "I'll add what I know, and tomorrow we'll start. As I said before, the time has come when Poyet County——"

A smart *rat-a-tat-tat* on the door cut his words short.

"Come in!" called Berwick.

The door opened and a stocky, bow-legged man of about thirty came in, closing the door behind him. He was dressed in a neat uniform, resembling that of the Army except for roll-collared coat, and carried a Stetson in his hand.

"Hello, McManus!" greeted McCrann, and both Walsh and Doctor Gray arose. "This is Mr. Walsh, Dr. Gray, and Mr. Berwick, McManus. Gentlemen, meet Sergeant McManus of the State Police."

IX

THE newcomer was sandy-haired and broad-shouldered, his square face covered with a rich crop of freckles. When he smiled, which he seemed to be in the habit of doing frequently, there was a glimpse of gold in his mouth. His nose had been treated roughly in the past—it was both flat and broken. Nevertheless

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there was something attractive in the misshapen countenance which was borne out by steady, keen blue eyes.

His voice was a rather high tenor. Berwick knew instantly that Sergeant McManus probably warbled a wicked falsetto in extempore quartets.

"Is this the Berwick that found Allison's body?" inquired McManus.

"The same. We were just talking things over, sergeant," said Walsh rapidly, leaping to his feet and taking two choppy paces up and down the narrow space beside the bed.

Berwick looked over at McCrann as McManus turned to find a resting place for his Stetson. McCrann nodded and his lips formed the words—

"He's all right."

"Excuse me a moment while I speak privately to Mr. McCrann," said the doctor suddenly, and beckoned McCrann into the hall.

In a few seconds they returned.

"Sergeant, you're here to investigate the murder of Allison, I presume?" asked Gray, his eyes boring into the sergeant.

"Yes, sir."

Gray inspected the tip of his cigar for a second, and then said deliberately:

"Mr. McCrann tells me that he has cooperated a little with you, and that he believes he knows your attitude about certain matters. Am I right in assuming that you would buck the powers that be to clear up this murder, and perhaps clean up some of the crooked office-holders of this county along with the murder? It is our opinion that some of the forces of the law are mixed up in this affair—some of your bosses, perhaps."

McManus smiled.

"I'm here to get any lawbreaker whatsoever," he stated.

"That's sufficient, I think. Here's the story up to where we were when you came in. We are all laying our cards on the table, McManus, preparatory to starting something."

He summarized Berwick's experiences and the reasons McCrann had for deeming it possible that the sheriff of Poyet County knew more than he should of the murder. McManus smoked and listened, interjecting a few questions as the story unfolded.

"So much for that," concluded Gray. "Now maybe I can give a little more light on Larkin. It's time for the citizens of this county and the honest representatives of the law to clean out some of the crooked bunch that're running us. I've known they were crooked for years, but never until this day did I dream of how far they were going.

"Larkin was born here in the mountains and is a self-made man. After he made a little money he got into politics, and was a great success for this reason; he knew the mountains and the mountain people. For some reason he was, or made, himself, solid with both sections of the mountaineers in this county—the Calhoun crowd and the Chatfield group. As you probably all know, the Calhouns and the Chatfields enlisted practically everybody in the mountains on one side or the other. For nearly thirty years, there's been a private little war going on, made famous through the newspapers all over the country, and the forces of law and order were helpless, gentlemen, helpless! And we here didn't care much. They kept to the mountains, and we figured it a good thing to let 'em kill themselves off.

"Larkin went up into the mountains and delivered seventy-five per cent. of the mountain vote. That swung Poyet County. He became somewhat of a power in the State. Poyet County representatives were his men. The district attorney and the judges were more or less his men. His mountaineers elected 'em, and could make or break 'em. Then he used that power of his to get practical immunity for mountain murderers—what few were accidentally caught—and moonshining was as safe and legitimate a business as carving up miners, or drawing up contracts or running airplanes.

"Larkin was getting more money—graft—all the time. And we stood it, knowing it, because on the whole things were better than they'd been before. Then Larkin came out for sheriff, about six or eight years ago, swearing that if elected the Calhoun-Chatfield feud would stop.

"Well, his election was a snap. It was a walk-over. I voted for him myself, because I knew he could stop that business any time he wanted to. That feud was making this county a byword all over the country. I've read law and order editorials in New Orleans papers holding West Virginia and Poyet County up as horrible examples. And they were right.

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"He was elected, and he stopped that feud. I'll say that. It just ceased. Furthermore, he went around to the revenue men and told them to quit getting a few men killed every year and leave that to him. They did, and it seemed as if everything was suddenly as quiet as a country church in Ohio on Monday night. There was plenty of moonshine always for sale in the towns, as there'd always been, but the papers weren't blossoming out with new murders in the mountains every month, revenue men weren't getting killed—it was all peaceful. Why, as I live and breathe, gentlemen, newspapermen and magazine writers have come down here and written up Larkin as a mountain man who was elected sheriff, took his life in his hands and went up into the mountains and stopped the deadliest feud known in the history of the Cumberlands; stopped moonshining which had been going on for a hundred years and all that stuff! Fact!

"I knew what was going on. Heard it mostly from patients of mine—I get an occasional mountain case, and as a doctor I've been around when some babies were born and done other things for a few of the mountaineers that make it safe for me down on the outskirts of that country. Larkin did stop the feud by promising Jeff Calhoun and Jim Chatfield, two of the crookedest and most no-account men the mountains ever knew, a lot of privileges.

"Jeff Calhoun, particularly, has a criminal record a yard long. If there's a badman living today he's the man. He's a murderer, a moonshiner, a highwayrobber. He's been tried twelve or thirteen times for minor offences, giving himself up, and the prosecution was a farce, the jury fixed, and he got off. Larkin again. Three times he's sat up there on the mountain and laughed at the law that wanted him for something. They never had any real proof, you understand—not a man in the mountains except Jim Chatfield would dare testify against him, and Jim never knew anything—that is, until they both worked together under Larkin. Jeff and Jim ruled their respective territories like kings.

"You say, Mr. Berwick, that the feud has started again, held down somewhat by fear of Larkin, as represented by Peters. That may help us.

"Meanwhile Larkin had been building up this taxi business. The inside story of how he knocked all competition down would probably be a thriller. I don't know much about it. I do know that a lot of freelance cars were wrecked, one or two chauffeurs killed, and a lot of stuff of that kind happened. Finally Larkin got the monopoly. It must be worth a thousand a month, net, run straight. His drivers are mostly imported men or mountaineers that he's brought down, like this Frank Fosset that warned Calhoun tonight. They're a tough lot, but good drivers and give good service. They make up a personal gang for Larkin.

"The more I think of it the more I believe that a lot of 'em must be criminals that have found sanctuary in Poyet County, where the sheriff is the chief criminal! Gentlemen, this murder has got me wrought up. I wouldn't have said that last night, although I suspected that the moonshine output of these mountains is bought by Larkin and distributed by him—not only in the three towns, but a considerable ways beyond. I see now what criminal possibilities there are in his organization.

"Peters is his man, so is this Chief of Police here, and probably we'll find that the law enforcement agencies of this county are all under his thumb. Pardon me—excluding the State Police!"

McManus grinned wryly.

"Maybe we ain't so good, either," he admitted slowly. "We ain't crooked, but —— if we ain't been dumb! He had us buffaloed, doctor. We been under unofficial instructions that Larkin was the greatest sheriff in seven States, could handle anything better'n we could, and as a matter o' fact we been piddlin' away on chicken thieves all the time. Yuh see we cooperate with the district attorney, the sheriff, health boards, and so forth, and here these birds 've been usin' us to spot sneakthieves, inspect buildin's, and general kindergarten stuff, while right under our noses all this's been goin' on. But it won't be long," he finished grimly. "To —— with Larkin and his power!"

There was a general scuffling as the men in the little room found new and more restful positions. Berwick inserted a cheroot into the long, ebony holder, lit it, puffed three perfect smoke-rings and then took upon himself the job of summing up.

"Looks like this, then, to my very limited intellect," he said. "Larkin is crooked on a large scale, so to speak. He

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wants to get McCrann and his airplanes out of this county for business reasons, partly, but mostly because he don't like the idea of airplanes taking peeks down at what's going on in those mountain fastnesses of his. He learned of the prospective shipment of money to that mine—probably framed things so that it would be sent that way. He may have men in the bank and another one who suggested the idea to the superintendent of shipping by plane. The coincidence otherwise would be entirely too strained. It ought to be easy to run down the men who were responsible for failing to ship the money, and the one who first suggested getting it by airplane.

"Anyway, at the last minute the mine man found another way to do it. Larkin figured this way, seems to me: he would get a slice of thirty-two thousand berries without any risk either to himself or to the men that pulled it. In addition, there'd be a man killed, a bad wreck, and no clue. That, gentlemen, would have knocked Larry's business sky-high—especially if followed by another one, maybe. Scare everybody off. A big drop in business with the additional pressure of threatening letters, and whatever other plans he has, would make Larry sell out to him cheap. Then he'd have competition disposed of, and some airplanes to use for whatever he has in mind. He'd also be in a position to crab getting the State Police into the air.

"He wasn't aware of the switch in plans, undoubtedly—at least not until too late. He had men waiting at the top of Old Baldy, knowing that the course would take the ships over near there. They could watch from there, spot the ship when it fell, get to it, grab the money, and beat it. That would explain the footprints. By sheer coincidence, probably, the ship happened to fall right there. Undoubtedly Calhoun and Harley were ordered to do their work as near there as possible.

"Then there was that forced landing, unfortunately for them. Then I came along. Neither Peters nor Chatfield knew anything about it, evidently, when they volunteered. Then when Calhoun talked with Peters he probably said something indefinite, maybe, about going easy; that there was something up and Larkin was behind it. That got Peters' goat, although I don't believe that foxy grandpa postmaster knows yet what it's all about except that he pulled a bone getting into it at all.

"Our wo-begone friend Chatfield, hating Calhoun and maybe feeling slighted at being left out of what was afoot, was tickled to death to do his bit, and maybe, as you mentioned, doctor, he can be used a little. Depends on how he's feeling, I suppose.

"When I lit out for Whitefield here to grab off Calhoun and this Harley, I have no doubt somebody—probably Peters—succeeded in getting a phone call through to the chief of police here, who you say is Larkin's man. Told him, probably, that I was after the jovial Mr. Calhoun and that maybe His Majesty Mr. Larkin wouldn't like it if Jeff was caught. Therefore the chief, before any complaint was made, got hold of a known man of Larkin's—Fosset—and sent him ahead to do the heavy warning act. Maybe old Macy didn't even know what Jeff was wanted for. Probably Peters was pretty hasty in his conversation.

"Probably Calhoun, Harley and Fosset are nesting in the mountains, and will be for some time. Looks to me like we've got to trace that airplane—Smith'll have the numbers, and that stuff; get next to the happenings behind that proposed shipment of money by air; and round up Calhoun, maybe with Chatfield's aid. You don't mind if we take a hand in the game, do you sergeant?"

"My ——, no!" exploded the admiring McManus, who had been following Berwick's quiet summary as if every word were a pearl of purest ray serene. "Take's a lot o' small fry to tip over the big man!"

"I wish I had a drink," stated Berwick soulfully. "I've had a full day. But I guess we'd better map out a campaign, hadn't we? I may not show it as much as Larry here does, but I'd sure like to land a satisfying smack or two on the men responsible for what I saw on Old Baldy!"

X

BERWICK awakened next morning after a rare experience—ten hours of leaden slumber. After breakfast he accompanied McCrann out to the field, which was the Whitefield terminal for the McCrann airplanes, and in a half-hour the three men—Larry, Berwick and young Smuts, the youth who was always on duty as guard—had gassed and oiled the scout.

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Berwick was to fly over to Young's Gap, and McCrann had already telephoned Smith to be on the watch and have the street clear for a landing. Larry had put it briefly and forcefully over the phone as a matter of law. With McManus back of them, already, this was not overdrawn.

It had been decided the night before that every step should be taken to keep Larkin and his henchmen from knowing that anything was afoot. There was no reason for the political boss to suspect that the State Police were gunning for bigger game than simply the murderer, or that Berwick and McCrann and the two Poyet County men were banded together to speed the cause of justice. Walsh and Gray were to enlist, secretly, the sympathy and support of picked men of prominence in the three towns, and if necessary arrange for private detectives to be imported to ferret out the operations of Larkin and his various chieftains—like Macy and Peters.

Berwick, using the excuse that he was to see that young Allison's body was properly shipped to Brandley, was to endeavor to get in touch with Jim Chatfield and find out where that mournful gentleman stood. McManus had suggested that Berwick do this, being greatly impressed, evidently, by the flyer's previous activities, both physical and mental. McManus himself, with the aid of Vardman, the other trooper stationed in the county seat, was to investigate the exact circumstances surrounding the failure of the Brandley bank to ship the Black Beauty pay-roll by express, and also the origin of the suggestion that it be shipped by airplane.

When the motor and fuselage numbers of the ship used by Harley and Calhoun were found it would be a simple matter, through the factory, to trace the ship. This would be attended to by Federal agents enlisted on telegraphic request from McManus to his chief at the State capital.

Berwick was stiff and sore from the unwonted exercise of the day before, and flying did not seem at all attractive to him as he climbed in the S. E. and turned on the gas. Smuts worked the propeller for him, and without undue delay the motor started and ran as smoothly as if it had not done a very full day's work in the previous twenty-four hours.

"See you in Brandley!" yelled McCrann, leaning over the cock-pit and yelling in his friend's ear. "As soon as Doc Gray gets out here I'll take off and we'll have things under way in jig time. Good luck."

Berwick took off, and in fifteen minutes was circling over Young's Gap.

Apparently the village was well-prepared for his advent, for there was not a vehicle parked anywhere near the scene of yesterday's landing. The sidewalks, however, in the vicinity of his previous landing were packed with people. Berwick cursed feelingly. Not much chance for anything to happen, but it was nerve-racking to feel that any mistake on his part would endanger several lives.

He changed his method this time—as he circled above the wires, well back from where he wanted to alight, he banked steeply, left wing high in the air, and applied full top rudder as he cut the throttle. In a vertical side-slip the tilted ship dropped through the wires with plenty of clearance. As he cleared them the pilot straightened in a wild skid. It was tight work, but the nose was pointed exactly parallel to the street a safe ten feet above the ground. It was not particularly spectacular, and a landsman would argue the point, but as a matter of fact there was more expert flying in that maneuver than in a solid hour of loops, spins and rolls. The most expert flying is done a few feet from the ground—it has to be if the pilot desires his neck to remain unbroken.

The scout came to earth on three points, and rolled swiftly down the center of the street. Berwick did not breathe freely until it had stopped safely, however. He did not dare turn the ship with the motor, for fear of hitting some of the crowd. As had been the case the day before, he was compelled to cut his motor dead so that the propeller had ceased its rotation before the vanguard of the curious arrived.

Smith was in the van, and helped Berwick to park his ship close to the curb. Zeke Peters volunteered as guard again.

"All right," Berwick assented. "Here's a two-spot in advance. Take care nobody comes near it."

His eyes ran over the jostling crowd for a moment. There were a few faces which seemed far from friendly, and there were a number of men, many of them in flannel shirts and overalls, who were talking intently and casting looks of various meanings at the stranger who had so suddenly and

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dramatically stepped into the current of life around Young's Gap.

"Let's go somewhere where we can talk," Berwick suggested to Smith.

The young mechanic led him silently across the street to a tumble-down building with a faded "Garage" sign on it. They went into a cubby-hole holding a desk, chair, and a large variety of old tires and tools.

"The body went out this morning," Smith said without preamble. "We got it last night. Sent it in a piano box we cut down —all we had. Sent it to Mr. McCrann like you said."

"Good boy. What luck did you have with that telephone call to the chief?"

"None. Line was busy so long I knew it wouldn't do no good."

"Peters," thought Berwick, and then said aloud—

"How about that dope on the airplane?"

"Yes sir. Right here."

He produced an envelope with two long numbers written thereon.

"You're positive these are correct?" queried Berwick. "The number plates weren't defaced or anything so that there's a chance that you didn't read 'em right?"

"No sir. They're O. K.," returned Smith stoically.

"Fine. You won't regret this, Smith. I can't tell you much, but I can say that you won't lose anything if matters work out the way we think. Now I've got one more favor——"

"Mornin', Mr. Berwick," interrupted a voice and the flyer turned to confront the round, white-mustached visage of Postmaster Peters.

"Good morning, Mr. Peters," he returned courteously.

"Wh-what's up, Mr. Berwick? Didn't expect to see ye back——"

The little old man was palpably somewhat ill at ease. His glance wavered from Berwick's steady regard, and his question died away unfinished.

"Just dropped into your village to see that the body of young Allison was shipped all right."

"How—how about Jeff Calhoun an' that other feller?" Peters asked, refusing to look up.

"When you so kindly phoned the chief of police that Jeff was wanted, somebody else must have got hold of it because Jeff never got to Whitefield. Went off in the mountains, they say. Harley must've gone with him."

Berwick's deliberate remark had a soul-satisfying effect. The fat little postmaster turned several colors in rapid order. Smith, unmoved, watched curiously.

"You make a bad job of being an outlaw," Berwick thought as he watched Peters, half-pitying and half-contemptuous.

His mind was busy with possibilities. If he dared take a chance!

"I have another thing I want to do while I'm here. The authorities wanted me to—er—get statements from you men about how the ship and Allison himself were found, you understand. I knew, of course, that I could get yours and Mr. Smith's here without trouble, but I've got to find Jim Chatfield, too. I wonder where I could find him?"

The old man's pitifully white face was lifted quickly and the mild blue eyes behind the old-fashioned glasses were beseeching.

"He lives a long ways back from here, Mr. Berwick. You don't want to bother with him—why man alive you'd be shot afore ye got anywheres near! I don't know who ye are, sir, but take my advice and keep out o' them mountains! They think already all these airplanes is after 'em an'——"

"I see. Smith, do you know where Chatfield lives?"

"Not—not exactly, sir, but pretty near. I——"

"Would you guide me up there?"

The mechanic twisted and turned in his seat, his steady eyes troubled.

"They don't any of 'em know me, sir, an' I'm afraid—goin' right in like that with a stranger—I got a wife—" he mumbled.

"Can't blame you," said Berwick calmly. "Nevertheless, I've got to see Mr. Chatfield. Mr. Peters, you seem to have quite some standing with the mountaineers. I think I'll have to ask you to take me to Mr. Chatfield's house."

"You don't know what you're a-sayin'!" the old man burst out in a cracked falsetto screech. "Go up in them mountains——"

"Exactly. Mr. Peters, don't you think you've already done enough—er—one way —to make it high time you showed your real desire to see justice done?"

Peters had been standing as if turned to stone, one arm upflung in the unfinished gesture with which he had been lending

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force to his passionate words. As Berwick ceased speaking he held the pose for a minute, and then suddenly relaxed. It seemed that every muscle in his body had gone weak. His lips moved without the slightest sound coming from them.

He licked his dry lips, and the white mustache seemed to be trembling ludicrously. He stole a glance at Smith, who was gazing stolidly at the floor.

Berwick, detached and alert, chanced another clinching remark.

"Things are starting to happen in this section, Mr. Peters, and stranger things will happen, as those who help me will find to their advantage," he said evenly.

"Who—who are you?" whispered the old man.

"Never mind. I told you enough yesterday to last you. The point is right here: You're either going to be one of the pursuers—or get caught!"

The broken old man who had so suddenly crumbled, as it were, on nothing more definite than a chance innuendo, looked around like a rat in a trap, his eyes coming to rest on Smith. Berwick, noticing, turned to the mechanic.

"Smith, would you mind leaving us alone for a moment?" he asked.

Without a word Smith got up and went out.

"Now, Mr. Peters, we can talk freely," the flyer said, motioning the postmaster to a seat.

HE TOOK time to light a cigaret with great care, in order to marshal his forces for the most effective attack. The rapid developments of the last few minutes had been a surprize. He was inclined to estimate the situation along these lines: Peters was a lieutenant of Larkin's, and had undoubtedly been mixed up in some more or less crooked politics, in which crookedness many thousand men otherwise as straight as a die, participate every year without straining their consciences.

Peters was also a man of some influence, probably through a combination of life-long residence in the section, and his position as Larkin's henchman. The way he had handled Calhoun and Chatfield had showed authority and force. On the other hand, it did not seem possible to Berwick that the fat, round-faced, white-haired little man before him was really a criminal. Certainly he had not known of the murder of yesterday before it had happened. Was it not possible that he suspected that Larkin's activities were more frankly criminal than unfair business methods and crooked politics?

That Peters was uneasy and distraught because the Larkin organization was being used—or a part of it, at least—for such things as murder and robbery? That he was conscience-stricken and frightened of the sinister things which, though he did not have a share in them, were nevertheless going on at his doorstep and in which he was a sort of vicarious accomplice? That the very vagueness of his knowledge made him more uneasy and upset and fearful, than he would have been had he actually been in possession of all the facts?

The old man wiped his face with a trembling hand while Berwick used up half a minute in the various operations of preparing a smoke. Leaning against the doorjamb, Berwick watched the specimen, who was squirming on his hook, for a moment and then suddenly leaned over the decrepit desk at which Peters was sitting.

"Listen, Mr. Peters!" he said in clipped, precise syllables which, without a hint of passion or eagerness, nevertheless left no doubt of the speaker's deadly earnestness. "A certain gang has been running this county. That gang has gone wild—murder, robbery, whatnot. They've killed the goose that laid the golden egg. Within a few hours the substantial men of Poyet County are going to be in control, and the men responsible for that murder on Old Baldy are going to be in jail. And when they're in jail the crooked politicians who've been running the affairs of this county will be in jail too. Get that?

"You owe your post-office job to that gang. You're the Young's Gap lieutenant for them, say. All right. You don't know that the machinations of your machine include murder, do you? All right, we'll give you the benefit of that. But mark my words; it'll take everything you can do, and every bit of help you can give, to wipe off the slate the fact that you've been one of the ring. Understand me clearly? I'm just one very amateurish and inconspicuous man in a group of many able and well-known men, who between them will sweep the Poyet County platter clean of riff-raff —

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quick. What I'm getting at is that killing me up there in the mountains won't do either you or them any good. And refusing to help me won't do a bit of good. For your own sake, sir, you'd better string along with me. And I guess you'll feel better, too."

Berwick, as he expressed it, had "shot his wad." In the long quarter-minute of silence that ensued he knew how much lay in the balance. Had he not handled Peters correctly, it would mean warning to Larkin and the rest; if he had, no telling what——

"Before God, Mr. Berwick, I didn't know nothin' about that murder!" said Peters suddenly, his voice very weary and his white head resting on his hands. "And I never knew anything that was goin' on except some bootleggin', which I didn't have anything to do with, myself, Mr. Berwick, an' politics. I knew Obadiah was kind o' rough on election day—or Jeff Calhoun and Jim Chatfield and them was rough for 'im—but politics has always been that way——"

"Larkin gets all the moonshine, doesn't he, and distributes it through his taxicab drivers, and ships some out to Charleston and Huntington I suppose?"

"So I hear. You see in this little town we don't know much about it, except that I know one o' Larkin's men takes some over to the miners sometimes. I've lived around here all my life, and I deliver every last vote to Obadiah—bein' druggist, I been sort of doctor too, an' even the mountain boys trust me, you see, an' I been able to help——"

He had been talking tonelessly, head in hands. It was apparent that the old man's world was in wreckage around him.

"I didn't think you knew much about what you were mixed up in," said Berwick heartily. "How did you happen to call up Macy last night?"

Peters looked up eagerly.

"Jeff says for me to let Obadiah know that Harley's ship was crashed up and says for me to tell him he and Harley was comin' over by way o' Whitefield to fix things up. Then he says: 'This here is for Larkin, Mr. Peters, so if there's anything comes up you know what to do,' says he.

" 'Let Macy know,' says he.

"I didn't know what to do—I wasn't in it, nor didn't know anything about it, an' bein' a friend o' Obadiah's, an' all—well, I just done what I was told, Mr. Berwick. I really didn't mean no harm."

The stammering excuses died away as Peters saw that Berwick was smiling.

"We'll just have you swear to that some time, Mr. Peters," said the flyer. "That'll square you for that telephone call which is going to make us chase Jeff Calhoun into the mountains, instead of getting him with ease and dispatch last night. Did Jim Chatfield know anything about that affair? Didn't, did he?"

"No, an' he's all cut up to think that Jeff Calhoun was in on somethin' he wasn't. They hate each other like snakes, an' if it wasn't for Larkin——"

"I understand the feud's being resumed again."

"I dunno. Looks so. Jim won't say nothin' what it's about, but he's sore. Somebody says he an' Jeff both had some moonshine in a batch which went to Brandley, an' some of it was bad. Jeff told around in the mountians that it was Jim that made it."

"I see. You don't know Harley?"

Peter shook his head.

"He takes after some o' the Harleys used to live over around Rock Creek, but the Whittakers done killed so many of 'em they moved out ten years ago. That was before the Whittakers took up with the Chatfields against the Calhouns. Seems to me I heard somethin' about the rest o' the Harleys comin' back to help the Calhouns, bein' that the Whittakers was on the Chatfield side."

Berwick thought swiftly.

Harley had said that he had learned to fly with the Curton Company. There was an excellent chance of his having served in the Army Air Service during the war in some capacity, although he had not mentioned it. Unless exempted by some physical defect, or through his job with an airplane factory, he would almost certainly have been assigned to the air service.

"Know the names of the Harley boys?"

"There was only one left, and the old woman. Let's see—it's a long time ago—seems to me it was Jed. That's it, Jed."

"Good. Now let's start to see Jim Chatfield. I take it that you're with us, Mr. Peters?"

Peters got to his feet wearily.

"I calculate so," he said. "I didn't

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know what was goin' on, an' I can't stomach it, but it goes against the grain, Mr. Berwick. Come on, an' I'll get the horses. It's twelve mile. An' if you got a gun, carry it."

XI

IT WAS after noon when the two horses, toiling up the steep, rocky trail, bore their riders in view of a small cabin set on the upward slope to the right of the road. The trail, although wide enough for a wagon, could not be called a road. To the left the descending mountainside was thickly wooded, but to the right, leading up to the cabin, it was half-cleared. A rotting barn, and odds and ends of refuse flung about, gave the whole place an air of utter desolation. A brood of children appeared around the corner of a shed, from the roof of which a board was missing. From its comfortable berth directly in front of the cabin door a pig got up and looked in the direction of the noise made by the horses' hoofs.

As if by magic a stunted little man, carrying an alertly-held rifle, appeared from the undergrowth at the left of the road.

"Howdy, Mr. Peters," the bent, weather-beaten mountaineer said slowly, but his eyes never left Berwick.

"Howdy yourself, John" said Peters eagerly. "This here's——"

"What're yuh doin' up hyar?" pursued the mountaineer, his bleared little eyes never wavering from the booted, bare-headed flyer.

"I brought Mr. Berwick here up to see Jim Chatfield. He's the man that was flying and saw the young feller that was killed in an airyplane wreck. Did Jim tell yuh how we found 'em? He wants to see Jim——"

"What fur?"

Berwick could barely control a grin, even if his hand did slide toward his shirt-front—and the gun. Just for safety's sake.

"Don't move, stranger," said the little mountaineer gently.

Peters flashed a warning look at Berwick, who froze into immobility and tried not to smile. The airman was of the type who may be said to be absolutely nerveless. Not without fear, he nevertheless did not consider danger a factor when there was an object to be attained. It was dismissed from his mind, so to speak. That characteristic, plus the inbred detachment which was a part of his nature, resulted in his being perfectly aware of the tension apparent in the scene, and yet he was able to enjoy it.

"Listen, John."

Peters got off his horse and talked rapidly almost pleadingly, with the man he called John. John's peaked, mahogany-colored countenance was garnished with two weeks' growth of thin whiskers, and there was some dark-brown drool caked underneath his lips. He was dressed in "hickory" shirt, nondescript trousers held up by home-made galluses, and shoes which showed the flesh of his sockless feet through many gaps.

His squinting gaze never shifted. He had not once looked at Peters.

"It's all right, John, I reckon," said a mournful, weary voice, and forth from the undergrowth stepped Jim Chatfield himself, jaws working methodically as usual, below the discouraged, faded brown mustache.

"Hello, Jim," Peters hailed joyfully. "Mr. Berwick here wants to see yuh——"

"Yuh ain't the law?" queried John suddenly.

"No indeed."

"I didn't think so. Mr. Peters, I reckon you wouldn't guide no law up here," stated John, relaxing a trifle.

The little old druggist looked unhappy.

"He wishes he was sure I'm *not* the law," Berwick reflected. "I told him the truth, which is the one thing he won't believe now."

Aloud he said to Chatfield, who was leaning lankly against a tree:

"I'd like to have just a moment's talk with you and Mr. Peters. Do you want Mr. ——"

"Bailey," put in Peters, who was like an eager, clumsy dog trying his mightiest to understand, alert to sense anything that seemed to hint at disaster. Peters was worried, and was bending every effort toward appeasing the two mountaineers and convincing them that nothing was wrong.

"Glad to know you, Mr. Bailey," Berwick said easily. "If you'd like Mr. Bailey present, it's all right with me."

"What is it yuh want?" queried Chatfield, motionless except for his jaws.

His dilapidated felt hat, shapeless and full of holes, was tilted low on his forehead to make room for his head against the tree.

Berwick once again used the device of leisurely preparing his cigaret to decide on

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his precise course. Peters, on the way up, had explained that all the families in this vicinity were allied to the Chatfields, as were the inhabitants over on the other side of Brandley with the Calhouns. Intermarriage, inbreeding—the curse of the back-country mountaineers—was responsible for not only the alliance but for a considerable part of the degeneracy which made many of the dark happenings of the country possible.

Jim Chatfield, last male of the Chatfield tribe, was leader by virtue of the fact that he was a Chatfield and it was primarily his feud with the Calhouns, and also because he was the best shot and "toughest nut t' crack" of the lot. And, although under the influence of Sheriff Larkin there had been a truce, hatred still reigned between the two clans—recently brought to a head in the matter of the bad moonshine.

Berwick decided to help feed the flame and then, if results warranted it, to try to play one side against the other. That had been approved by the board of strategy the night before, although, as every man there had declared, it was neither a pleasant nor a restful job.

"Mr. Chatfield, the reason for that cracked ship on Old Baldy, and the murdered man in it, was this—that ship was supposed to be carrying thirty-two thousand dollars—" he rolled out the sum impressively—"and some friend of Jeff Calhoun's in Brandley put him wise, supplied the ship, and told him to go get the money and he could have most of it. It seems that Jeff Calhoun stands well with some big bug down in the county seat."

Was he succeeding in his effort to feed the jealousy between the rival chieftains? His lazy eyes, seemingly innocent of any hidden meaning, watched the countenance of Jim Chatfield with concentrated attention. The wobegone face of the mountaineer did not change in the slightest—he chewed ruminatively, expectorated once with forceful precision, and did not move a muscle otherwise.

John Bailey shifted his gun and glanced toward Chatfield. Peters wiped the perspiration from his face and twitched nervously.

Berwick, waiting a moment for any sign either way from his listeners, finally resumed:

"Jeff Calhoun, Harley, the fellow that flew the ship, and another man named Fosset are in the mountains somewhere. If it takes the state militia, they're going to be caught."

He was on treacherous ground now—he saw the bent form of Bailey snap as if suddenly hurt, and the bleared little eyes focused swiftly on Berwick as fearful suspicion stood out in every line and hollow of the thin, weasel-like face.

Even Chatfield deigned to look up in surprize, and his jaws increased their rate per minute perceptibly.

"The sheriff after 'em?" he inquired dully.

"It seems that Sheriff Larkin—er—doesn't quite believe Calhoun is guilty," said Berwick, feeling his way. "But it's bigger than this county—that is, this is one job where the forces of the law far beyond Poyet County are at work."

Bailey lifted his gun and one horny thumb rested lovingly on the hammer. He looked at Chatfield as if for orders.

"Don't git hasty, John!" exclaimed the troubled Peters, his voice authoritative even if it did crack with excitement.

Chatfield straightened, spat deliberately, and with both hands pushed his ancient hat back on his head.

"Jest who are yuh, Mr. Berwick?" he asked, and for a fleeting moment the dull eyes met Berwick's steady gaze.

The flyer, tinglingly conscious of the fact that he was skirting a volcano which was likely to go into eruption at the slightest misstep, nevertheless answered the question promptly.

"Yesterday I was a friend of Mr. McCrann's, the man who runs some airplanes from Brandley, and I happened to discover that murder by accident and simply did what I could. Today I'm a messenger to the Chatfield clan from the wealthiest and most powerful men in Poyet County!"

Bailey relaxed a trifle, and Peters breathed noisily, as if he had held his breath during Berwick's speech. Chatfield bent, plucked a blade of grass, and chewed it thoughtfully.

"Does the sheriff know yuh 're hyar?" he asked.

"No."

"What d'yuh want?"

"We want the Chatfields to help the forces of the law get Jeff Calhoun, Frank Fosset, and Harley, the flyer, in addition to any one else in these mountains that helps 'em!"

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"Help the sheriff, yuh mean?"

Berwick's brain was working like lightning, and he decided to attack boldly.

"Before we even start after Calhoun, Sheriff Larkin will be removed from office, because there is ample evidence that the sheriff himself was the man that helped Jeff Calhoun do his stuff. In fact, Larkin furnished the information and the ship, and he and Jeff were going to split. Jeff is Larkin's right-hand man.

"Listen, Jim Chatfield! Nobody thought much of it when Larkin ran this county right, but when it comes to cold-blooded murder of an innocent man who was minding his own business, the citizens of this county are going to take a hand, and don't you forget it. They've got the goods on Larkin and Jeff Calhoun, and on you! Drop it!"

LIKE a streak of light he had drawn his gun as he saw Bailey, his face reflecting murderous fury, raise his own gun and take aim.

"Quick!" he snarled, and Bailey dropped his gun.

Suddenly ferocity, so astonishing and so terrible that even Berwick mentally quailed for a moment, changed the drooping face of Jim Chatfield into an evil, snarling, repulsive mask.

"Lift your gun on me, will you!" snapped Berwick. "You listen to me and you listen quietly. I'm here to give you all a chance to get in right with the men who are going to run this county, starting from just about tomorrow morning. And I don't want any false moves out of either one of you while I'm talking. Listen to me and do what I say, and you'll be living right here twenty years from now, undisturbed as long as you mind your own business. Get gay and a bunch of airplanes with machine guns on 'em will, if necessary, blow one of you to ——. Do you get that?

"We know that the Chatfields and the Calhouns have been helping Larkin in his crooked work. Calhoun and Larkin have committed murder. You haven't. If the Chatfields, knowing these mountains as you do, will throw in their strength on the side of the law, and help get Jeff Calhoun and his helpers, the Chatfields will start with a clean slate and there'll be no trouble with the law!"

Berwick's stinging, blazing words dropped like hot coals, and suddenly the lazy eyes were glowing. Even in his sudden wrath there was still, in the back of his mind, that detachment—an impersonal appraisal of the situation—which caused him to decide that the quick change to forceful measure and speech was the most effective thing he could do. Therefore, he continued to act his part.

The two feudists were motionless in their tracks, and the slowly composing countenance of Jim Chatfield was now the setting for two evil eyes that never swerved from the grimy, sun-reddened face of the stranger. Peters was apparently unable to move or speak, although he looked as if there was a torrent of expostulation ready to flow from his dry lips. Up on the hill the children were watching interestedly, and out of the corner of his eye Berwick could see a woman in the doorway, shading her eyes with one hand.

His horse moved restively in the instant of silence. Berwick, Colt still ready, leaned over a trifle to bore into the eyes of Chatfield.

"Things are changing, Mr. Chatfield. We can get our men without you—don't mistake that. But we can get 'em easier and quicker if you throw in with us—we've both got a feud against the leader of the Calhoun's, and we might as well work together. And mark this: The day is past when Jeff Calhoun can hole up on the mountain and laugh at pursuit.

"Ask Peters. You know where he stood, don't you? Well, let him tell you that when Jeff Calhoun murdered young Allison the power of Larkin started to crumble.

"I'll let you talk privately, and I'm going to put up my gun. Killing me won't do you a —— bit of good. It'll mean that you're hunted down with Jeff Calhoun—by the State Police, the militia if necessary, and a posse of hundreds of citizens from the Three Towns. And there'll be airplanes circling over you that will carry guns that can mow you down like sheep."

As he finished Berwick thrust the Colt carelessly into the front of his flannel shirt again, and deliberately wheeled his horse, which ambled a few feet down the trail. The flyer's back was toward Bailey and Chatfield as he reined in the bony steed and allowed him to browse on the sparse grass in the center of the rocky lane.

It was more or less deliberately theatrical,

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and there was some little suspense for a few seconds, but on the whole, with Peters back of him, he did not think he was taking as much of a chance as it seemed. He lit a cigaret, crooked one leg over the saddle-horn, and waited quietly while guarded words from behind him indicated that discussion was afoot. Unless he was badly mistaken, the mountaineers had been impressed—and scared.

It was several minutes later that Peters' raised voice called:

"All right, Mr. Berwick. Jim's throwin' in with us."

"Good," answered Berwick cheerily, wheeling and approaching the little group. "You're making no mistake, Mr. Chatfield."

"Th' —— with that," stated Chatfield wearily, his normal air of hopeless sadness once again enshrouding his lank form. "We was fixin' to git a few shots at them Calhouns anyway."

Berwick threw back his head and his infrequent, rollicking laugh rang out in the drowsy, sunlit air.

"Well, here's the plan— Before I go on, though, remember this: we want those men alive, but, unless they're different than I think they are, it may have to be dead."

"Reckon so," stated Chatfield, pious hope in his flat voice.

XII

SHORTLY after four o'clock that afternoon Berwick, with the aid of Zeke Peters and Smith, one on each wing, was warming up the S.E. on the main thoroughfare of Young's Gap under the eye of the interested populace. He took a good five minutes for it, and his eyes roved from instrument to instrument many times over. The motor had been leading a hard life the last two days, and although the trip to Brandley was a short one, it was nevertheless over very rugged country. He made a mental resolution to keep a wary look-out for McCrann's forced-landing fields.

If the motor felt any ill effects it hid them perfectly, for the eight cylinders roared away evenly without a miss on either magneto. Satisfied, Berwick nodded, dropped his goggles over his eyes, and set his feet on the rudder. The scout leaped ahead under the spur of the throttle, and was almost instantly scooting down the hard-packed road, tail in the air. Berwick gave the natives a bit of a thrill and expressed a little of his satisfaction by holding the wheels on the ground long after there was flying speed and then jerking back on the stick. Straight from the ground the little craft shot upward, through the narrow fairway between the wires, and then, nose down, flew level to pick up the flying speed which had been nearly lost in that breathless zoom.

Berwick took care to get a good three thousand feet while still within gliding distance of the street, which he had instructed Smith to keep clear until he had disappeared. The motor, throttled to the minimum r.p.m. at which the ship could still climb gradually, ran along evenly. Satisfied, the pilot banked, straightened, and set sail for Brandley.

He wondered idly whether there was as much excitement in Brandley as there seemed to be in Young's Gap and Whitefield. The trend of remarks he had overheard in Young's Gap seemed to indicate that the residents were of the opinion that another mountain war was imminent. The encounter between Calhoun and Chatfield had been magnified, and in general the actual murder of Allison seemed to be dwarfed by the probability of future action between the two clans who composed most of the actual mountain population.

"After all, what's a murder more or less in this neck of the woods?" Berwick reflected.

While Brandley was still far in the distance he saw a long narrow clearing which he judged to be one of McCrann's fields. It was typical of the plodding, thorough McCrann, he of the warm friendliness and hard common sense, to think of constructing emergency fields. A man to tie to, either friendship or business.

Berwick was surprized at Brandley. There was a square, in the center of which was a big building which was probably the court-house. The town had been built in a valley, perhaps a mile wide, and the main line of the railroad running from Cincinnati, on east to Washington and Philadelphia, was easy to pick up in contrast to the branch line which broke from the parent road at Brandley. Several coal mines dotted the mountain sides, and numerous concrete roads, gleaming whitely in the sunshine, centered in the spacious square.

The valley ran, roughly, north and south, and Bercrann Field with its big white T could be seen plainly on the extreme

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southern edge of the town. Berwick, spiralled down leisurely for a landing, sized up the field and approved McCrann's layout of his headquarters field. As had been the case in Whitefield, ample provision against one of the greatest hazards of the air—a field surrounded by obstacles—had been made. The field was bounded on two sides by nothing more troublesome than low fences. On the east side was a road, a line of telephone poles, and a big shed, undoubtedly the hangar.

One ship was on the line in front of the hangar. To north and south there were vacant lots which, even if small and rough, were protection enough against that deadly emergency—motor failure on the take-off. McCrann had no need to exaggerate in his advertising. Expert flying under ideal conditions is safe enough, but ideal conditions are almost never found.

The wind sausage atop the hangar showed a sligh east wind, and the T was pointed diagonally across the field, northeast. The airdrome was not wide enough, east and west, for a safe landing, but in the mountains high winds were rare and the possible landing directions included every point of the compass except direct east and west.

It was not necessary to circle over town—the pilot was straightened for the field two hundred feet high and almost as far back from the field. With idling motor he dropped down over the vacant lot to the north, skimmed the fence, and floated across the T a foot high. Came an instant when the scout seemed to hover, and the stick came all the way back to get the tail down as the ship hit the ground. It was a good landing.

The man in cover-alls who had been sitting on the motor of the V seven—evidently the ship McCrann had been flying—was ready, and helped Berwick taxi straight to a niche on the line close to the larger ship. He was a frank-faced, stocky young fellow in old Army clothing.

"Mr. McCrann will be down in just a minute, I guess, Mr. Berwick," he said as Roj clicked off the switches and threw one long leg over the side. "Here he comes, now."

Berwick followed his pointing finger and saw McCrann's big form emerging from a small bungalow set on a slight rise well back from the road on the eastern edge of the field, and a few hundred yards down the highway, toward town.

"Lives close to business, eh," commented Berwick. "You're chief mechanic of Bercrann Field, I presume."

"Chief and only," grinned the young fellow, shaking his long, yellow hair back from his grimy face. "My name's Slater. Was in the 94th Pursuit overseas—Hat-in-the-Ring."

There was pride as he mentioned the famous squadron which had boasted of a full half-dozen aces in the war.

"Glad to know you, Slater. There was a fellow over at Whitefield—he a mechanic too?"

"Half-way. He's learning. He's sort of caretaker and rough-and-ready fixer over there. We have another one in Canberry like him."

Slater accepted a cigaret and as Berwick walked around his ship watched him with interest. He knew the flyer well by reputation in France, and by many vivid descriptions of him by McCrann.

"Looks a —— of a lot more like an ace than he does a bloated plutocrat!" he told himself.

Which was the truth. The hours of flying plus mountain climbing and horseback riding had made of the trim St. Louisan a far from aesthetic sight. Boots, breeches and flannel shirt were smudged with oil and grease and coated over with dust and grime of variegated origin. There were several rips in his attire, likewise. His face, unused to many hours exposure to the sun and entirely unaccustomed, of late, to facing a terrific air-blast for hours at a stretch, was reddened sadly. His straight, thin nose, in particular, was dyed a peculiarly shiny-pink at the tip, and his eyes squinted slightly. And yet, withal, there was a more significant difference in that long, thin face. Some change of spirit within, while not really changing the mask, made itself felt.

"Some ship!" Slater opined as Berwick completed his casual round. "I'll get her shined up and looked over for you by tomorrow, some time, if the boss lays off flyin' like he said he was going to for a while."

"She's done a lot of stepping since yesterday morning," admitted Berwick, "and sure did strut her stuff pretty. Well, Larry, you can watch your property while you eat, can't you?"

"I'll say so. What luck, Roj?"

"Good."

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"Come up to the house. Mary and Ann are waiting patiently."

"Who is Ann, may I be so bold as to inquire?"

"Mary's sister. Don't worry—the house isn't crowded!"

"Wait till I get my baggage and I'll be with you."

He procured said baggage, consisting of the tooth-brush bought in Whitefield, and his Colt.

"Your trunk is here," Larry assured him. "Let's go."

"You're quite the young monarch of business," grinned Berwick as they set out for the house. "You might be any self-respecting plutocrat's right-hand man in your decent blue suit and your Christmas tie."

Big McCrann did look imposing in civilian clothes, as many outdoor men of unusual stature do. He seemed to be relaxed a bit now, for the first time since the two friends had been together. The Irishman was not given to physical expression of inner emotions, but during those hours at Whitefield he had been like a caged beast. He was of the type which masks unusual soft-heartedness behind a somewhat gruff exterior and Berwick knew that not only was he dangerously aroused by the murder itself, but his real grief was made more poignant because he took a portion of the responsibility on himself.

Consequently Berwick, observant as always, determined to do his part to inject some fleeciness into life as far as he could. McCrann's more normal bearing gave him his chance, and as they walked toward the rambling white bungalow, their conversation was that of two long-separated friends rather than the business conference of two amateur detectives.

A portion of the low-rolling slope had been plowed, raked and sowed to grass, which was just beginning to film the loam with green. Two great trees set either side of the new gravel-walk shaded the shining dwelling. Everything was brand new, it was easy to see, and it was likewise apparent that in a few months it would be a very charming little homestead.

BERWICK had been as curious as it was in his nature to be—which, comparatively speaking, was a very minute quantity—about McCrann's wife. She came out on the small veranda to meet them, and he got a distinct shock. Mrs. McCrann was as fragile and dainty as her lesser half was big and clumsy. Blonde hair with tints of red, was drawn tightly back from a small, merry face which smiled up at Berwick as she extended her hand and said—

"This is a pleasure we've been looking forward to, Mr. Berwick."

"You haven't been alone in that," Roj assured her. "I'm bound to shake hands despite the fact that my glove is made of grease. May I congratulate Larry? I don't know that I could truthfully felicitate you——"

"When Roj get's talking his Harvard it's time to bring him back to earth," grinned McCrann. "Practise that on Ann—she loves it—"

"What?"

A tall, thin girl with black hair and a pair of over-sized rubber-tired glasses which seemed to mask all of her face except a wide, humorous mouth, came out the door and greeted Berwick with casual ease.

"I'll take you up to your room," Larry offered finally.

"Thanks. You'll pardon me if I disappear for several hours? It will take at least that long to remove the West Virginia coating I have on," smiled Berwick, and forthwith departed to plunge into his trunk, dive for the bathroom, and emerge an hour later with shaven face, and sleeky brushed hair.

McCrann came up as he was dressing and despite all Berwick's efforts insisted on a detailed report of the day's work.

"Came out fine—I'll tell you as soon as I get sartorially set. By the way, what's your method of handling the ladies? How much do they know, if any, and if not or so, why?"

"Getting that down to its least common denominator, they know everything for no good reason," responded McCrann, snapping out of his serious attitude for a moment.

"Well, let's wait and talk it over when they're present to save repeating," suggested Berwick. "Give us a mental vacation. I didn't know whether you wanted your wife to——"

"Mary's a sport," stated McCrann.

"You're a lucky brute," Berwick told him cryptically.

He scented a romance behind the winning of that well-poised, charming young woman

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by the awkward rough diamond before him.

"Say, Larry do you remember that time in Nancy when Pete West got tanked and showed up at the airdrome next morning in pajamas, Sam Browne belt and a top hat? I saw him in San Francisco Christmas——"

And they were off on an hour's debauch of reminiscence, artfully led by the quietly efficient Mr. Berwick.

At dinner, which was served by the sisters without embarrassment or the attempt to make any excuse for not having a maid, Berwick continued to have good success in prodding McCrann out of his brooding abstraction. The body of young Allison had arrived less than an hour before Berwick himself. The two girls seconded his efforts, and it was a jolly meal. Foregathering on the veranda in the warm dusk after dinner, the day's events were finally narrated by Berwick to a flatteringly interested audience.

He was just fairly launched into his yarn, which he embellished with a wealth of dryly humorous detail, when a stout figure walked into the pool of light cast by a street-lamp, coming toward the house.

Berwick checked his narrative and exclaimed—

"I believe that's Doctor Gray."

"It is," nodded Ann Garford. "There are only three men in the village who dare carry canes, and the other two are out of town."

"I'll sub for one of 'em," laughed Berwick. "It's Gray, right enough."

The genial doctor hailed them and came in. After being presented to the two sisters he shot an inquiring look at McCrann, which that gentleman interpreted correctly and answered:

"We were just checking up, and Roj was telling us how he made out today. Good news, doctor."

Berwick gave the doctor a brief résumé of the ground he had covered, and then went on to describe his success with Chatfield.

"The combination of his hate for Calhoun, his jealousy because Calhoun seems to be a bigger toad in Larkin's puddle than he is himself, and his fear of the unknown as represented by me, finally got him. Peters helped greatly, too. They're ready to turn into an impromptu bunch of deputies any time we give the word."

"The Chatfields representing the law!" chuckled the doctor. "As an old resident I want to tell you two youngsters that from the Poyet County point of view this bids fair to be an epic!"

"I've got the letters off all right," McCrann said. "I wrote Colonel Payne at Cook Field, Roj, and told him all about it and McManus got his chief over the phone and a letter of corroboration will get in from the State Police. I asked for three machine-guns and C.C. gears. I found that Slater knows all about mounting 'em. I don't think there'll be any question about our getting them inasmuch as we're both full-sized reserve officers.

"McManus is over at the Black Beauty mine finding out who made the original suggestion about getting that kale over by airplane. It's a cinch that the robbers would have that idea planted. It would have been a hundred-to-one shot for them to figure on the idea striking the superintendent out of a clear sky. Investigation here at the bank was left to the tender mercies of Dr. Gray."

"I wonder what the best way of getting the dope out of these numbers of mine is?" queried Berwick. "Write, or wire, or send a man——"

"Leave that to me," interrupted Gray, fanning himself with his straw hat. "I'm not much of a detective, but what it takes to get the sleuths busy I've got, if I do say it myself.

"Listen, boys. I've been as busy as a Congressman sending out seeds all day. And I've got several members of friend Larkin's official family at work.

"It was rather hard to do, but they finally came around. Larkin runs this county, as I said last night, on account of the votes he delivers. That means that the district attorney and others are in his crowd, so to speak. They know he's crooked, but since the first day our monkey-ancestors pointed out the leader of the bunch, politics has been a game where no ordinary rules of honesty worked. Many a sterling church member who wouldn't beat a man out of a nickel or knowingly break a law, will be a party to every brand of political chicanery in existence. The game has always been that way.

"What I'm getting at is this: Walton, the D. A., for instance, wouldn't be above making a joke prosecution of some minor offense if Larkin slipped him the word.

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Furthermore, the court-house bunch are winking at a lot of stuff Larkin puts over, and some of 'em, undoubtedly, are getting their slice. But when it comes to a thing of this sort, unadulterated murder, most of the bunch of pretty straight eggs—aside from politics—aren't among those present. Walton, now, had no idea that there was anything afoot except Larkin's grabbing a monopoly on the trucking business, and protecting the mountain moonshiners for the sake of votes. I went in to him first and laid down the law, and believe me Sam Walton was knocked in a heap. Furthermore, he's right with us.

"He's handling the bank investigation, and he'll also arrange for a quick tracing of that airplane. Where's the factory, did you say? Cleveland? There'll be an operative at work on that as soon as a wire can get to Cleveland.

"He's also going to look into the two hundred men, about half strangers and half mountaineers, who work for Larkin in his taxi business.

"Walton is about the only man in the crowd I was sure enough of to take a chance on. I'm firmly convinced that all the law-enforcement agencies below Sam Walton are tainted more or less by Larkin, and just how far they'd go I don't know. The lower in the scale the further they'd go, probably. We'll get the goods on Larkin, round up Jeff and his buddies by authority of the State Police and the D. A., and starting from there just turn the Three Towns and this county upside down.

"I've braced over a dozen of the most prominent men in this town, and Walsh is doing the same; he phoned me tonight. There's a sort of underground vigilance committee being formed secretly, and there won't be many men in it that can't draw their checks for several thousand, cash.

"I also gave Sam that threatening note, McCrann. He's strictly all right—a politician who can wink the other eye and does it often, but no accomplice in murder. I put it right up to him: asked him whether Larkin had anything on him that would make Sam himself afraid of what might come out, and the old fire-eater darn near threw me out of the office!"

"That listens pleasingly," murmured Berwick, drawing at the pipe he had unearthed in his trunk.

"It's got these men I've been talking to by the ears," chuckled the doctor. "They couldn't believe the thing, and the possibilities Larkin has in this county as an out-and-out crook. If it wasn't for that poor kid Allison—by the way, the autopsy resulted in finding the bullet all right—shot from a Springfield, Army type. As I was saying, if it wasn't for young Allison being a sacrifice to that gang of thugs I'd be enjoying myself. Made me twenty years younger already."

McCrann's big hands clenched on his knees.

"I'd enjoy having my hands on their throats," he said slowly, and at the timbre in the deep voice his wife's hand sought his quickly.

"You'll get them, Larry, and you'll do a good job of it!" she flashed.

"No weeping vine clinging around his feet!" reflected the admiring Berwick.

Inside the house the telephone bell jangled. McCrann got up silently to answer it. After a few words from his end of the wire he hung up and his heavy tread came down the hall.

"You and I are wanted at the sheriff's house, Roj," he said, a grim smile touching his lips.

"Good for our side. Let no moment pass without excitement," responded Berwick, uncoiling his long length. "I'll seek my *chapeau* and be right with you."

He got hat and stick and returned to hear Doctor Gray saying:

"Stay with the ladies, if you don't mind, and contain my curiosity until you return. Might be wise not to let him suspect that anybody aside from McManus knows anything more than the general public."

"Right," nodded Larry. "Ready, Roj?"

"Champing at the bit, old-timer."

THEY swung off down the street at a brisk pace. It was more than half a mile to Larkin's residence, and on the way they had to cross the square and go down the main business street for a distance of two blocks. The stores were fairly modern and prosperous-looking, although on every side there was a shiny rawness discernible in buildings and equipment. McCrann was greeted by several people, and interested eyes followed them.

The murder was the reigning sensation of the town, due to the fact that the pilot was well known and had been a resident of the

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town itself. Another mountaineer murdered meant little, but a townsman was different. There was considerable discussion as to whether the modish young civilian with McCrann could possibly be the visiting flyer. He looked more like a big-town lounge-lizard—due largely to his cane, which in any city below a million population is considered a sign of utter demoralization.

The Larkin home—he was a bachelor—was a very small frame house set on a pocket-handkerchief lawn on a quiet side street, well out toward the edge of town. Its neighbors were of similar size and architecture—the neighborhood impressed Berwick as the natural habitat of small-salaried workers.

"You are now about to enter the dwelling of one of the richest men in the county, excluding some of the coal-operators who don't usually honor the district by having their homes here," stated McCrann.

"I can't blame 'em," admitted Berwick.

The door was opened by a stout, motherly looking woman with a face that somehow looked a hundred years old. It was covered with deep-cut criss-crosses of wrinkles, tinged a deep brown, and was thin and full of hollows in contrast with her extreme stoutness. Her toothless smile was far from unattractive, as it might have been, and there was a bird-like sharpness in her small, clear eyes that hinted at a pleasurable interest in life.

"Come right in—Obe's expectin' of yuh," she said, and showed them into a small parlor furnished in horsehair, tintypes and doilies.

"Them flyers is hyar, Obe!" she called as she bustled down the hall.

"All right!" came a muffled voice, apparently from the cellar. "Take 'em in the office!"

The spry old lady reappeared through the second door into the parlor and motioned them into a small room furnished with a huge, roll-top desk, revolving chair, four straight chairs in a precise row against one wall, and a rag rug.

"Bring on the lion—I'm not impressed with his cave," whispered Berwick.

As if by magic, utterly noiseless, a form filled the doorway into the hall.

"Howdy, Mr. McCrann. And this hyar is Berwick, I reckon," said Larkin.

He did not offer to shake hands, but moved with deliberation to his desk, sat down, and abstracted from a drawer at his right a corn-cob pipe. He filled it from some loose tobacco in his coat pocket, and lighted it in utter silence.

He was of medium height, Berwick decided, although he was so gaunt that he appeared taller. He wore a suit of black which hung loosely on him, and a soft white shirt. A flowing black necktie in a loose bow knot harmonized with comfortable old-fashioned congress gaiters. His feet were enormous.

His long face, angular and lantern-jawed, was naturally dark-skinned rather than sunburnt. A large, high-bridged nose jutted forth prominently over a sweeping, well-kept mustache of iron gray which hid a thin, cruel mouth. His eyes were heavy-lidded below bushy eyebrows that angled upward and outward. There was a curious hint of the Oriental in those eyebrows that was utterly at variance with the remainder of his countenance, and the strange contrasts in his facial make-up made him a striking-looking man. His forehead was high and narrow, the thin hair parted precisely and worn a trifle long in back. His neck was shaved, and Berwick was aware of the thought that he probably wore a large black hat of the type affected by born actors who get side-tracked into running for Congress.

Suddenly the old woman appeared at the door, a short clay pipe in her mouth.

"Here's some matches—I jest recollected ye was all out," she said without embarrassment, and placed a large box on his desk.

He smiled as though in amused affection, got to his feet with a courtly air, although she had just stepped inside the door, and thanked her. His voice was remarkably soft and rich—and persuasive.

"I jest wanted to get the facts about the alleged murder o' young Allison, boys," he said slowly, leaning back in his chair. "You saw him first, I understand."

The heavy lids raised over the prominent brown eyes, and in the instant which they remained fixed on Berwick he felt an almost physical impact. The pupils were extraordinarily large—so large that there seemed no whites whatever. There was power and passion and ruthlessness in them. Then the lids dropped again, masking them.

"I did, sir."

"Why didn't one of yuh report it t' my office?" asked the sheriff.

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The hint of mountain dialect became musical and pleasing when spoken in that magical voice, although, as in his clothing and his manner, there was always a hint of the actor.

"It was reported to the authorities in Whitefield, the nearest place, and I thought that sufficient," returned Berwick, slouching easily in his chair. "As a matter of fact, I went to a lot of trouble and considerable danger to get the news over to Whitefield quickly. I assumed that the chief would do the honors, so to speak."

"Quite right," granted the sheriff. "O' course yuh're a stranger here, an' can't know that in a matter like that most of the officers are helpless. Tell me jest what happened."

Berwick told the story, omitting nothing except their suspicions. He made it seem as if they thought Calhoun's desertion of the car for the mountains had been his prearranged plan.

"Then what we have is this," stated Larkin. "Allison was shot as yuh say. This other ship, goin' somewhere to carry passengers, jest happened to crash near by. No reason tuh doubt this other flyer's word, as I see. Any ways, Calhoun says *he* wasn't in the ship, which seems natural. As a man that knows the mountains, comin' from them misunderstood people myself, it ain't reasonable yuh could hire 'im to get in one. This pilot says he wasn't too. Ain't much tuh go on 's far as Calhoun goes. My idea is that some of the mountain people—they're very suspicious and don't understand the outside world—have been thinkin' that these airyplanes o' yourn, McCrann, has been carryin' revenue men or other officers of the law and they—very wrong in 'em—took some shots at it and made a lucky hit."

Berwick hid a smile.

"—— if that voice don't almost persuade me!" he told himself. "If it wasn't for those eyes that bird could get my watch by just asking me for the time."

"It's too bad—too bad," Larkin went on meditatively, in a tone that was almost fatherly. "Allison was a fine boy and it's hard on you, McCrann. There was no way an ignorant backwoodsman like Calhoun could know anything about that money. Or get a plane. You see how ridiculous circumstantial evidence is when it's looked over careful-like. If I was to go after Jeff—an' I guess I'm one o' the few men, if not the only one, that would dare to—he would resist, and rightly, too. All in all, it looks like nothin' but an unfortunate accident—a lucky shot from the ground."

Berwick looked a warning at the stewing McCrann.

"I believe you're probably right, sir, but of course being a stranger, and at the moment I thought there was only one culprit possible. As you say, an ignorant mountaineer and an airplane and a deep-laid plot are ingredients that do not mix up well."

Larkin caressed his drooping mustache and his heavy-lidded gaze rested on Berwick benevolently.

"O' course, I don't mean to say we must let this here clue slip entirely," he stated, as father to son. "My idee was this. Knowin' that it's only a thousand to one shot that Jeff is in it all, kind o' let the matter rest fur a while. Then, a little later, when it's kind o' blown over, there'll come a chance to ease in tuh Jeff easy-like when he ain't suspicious. I'll be investigatin' around and find out how he happened to be over thar in that country and find out whether he's got an alibi. That'll save sacrificin' good men, mebbe, jumpin' right in tuh him on such slight evidence."

Berwick, coolly watchful, noticed that the sheriff's dialect sometimes wore thin, so to speak—there were slight intervals when his words were those of a reasonably well-educated man. And yet there were "thars" and "hyars" and "ain'ts" which spoke of the mountains.

"That seems to me a good plan, sheriff. The chances are that the money which was supposed to be in the ship and that chance shot were merely coincidences."

McCrann moved restlessly, as if physically unable to keep still. He was not adept at dissembling wrath or disgust, and his heavy, dark face was a screen on which his present emotions were written for all to read. Larkin, who was sitting with his profile toward the flyers, turned his head slightly and his eyelids raised like curtains. The oversized, protuberant eyes seemed to have concentrated in them all the wild, unleashed passions of the mountain people whence he sprang. His eyes remained open for several seconds, and then the lids drooped again.

"I'm certainly sorry fur yuh, McCrann," he said gently. "Yuh know I told yuh

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some time ago when I offered tuh take over your airyplane business, that you was up against a tough proposition. I know the mountains boys. I may say I have even got some notice from the outside world, the way I handled 'em—stoppin' one o' the bloodiest feud fights this country ever knowed. How did I do it? By goin' up among 'em and usin' my knowledge of 'em, and makin' a few concessions in order tuh stamp out the bigger things. I love 'em—they're my people."

His resonant voice seemed to brood on those last words with a world of wistful longing.

"How this bird would put it over a New York magazine writer!" thought Berwick, fascinated. "Me too—yesterday."

"So what I'm tellin' yuh, McCrann, may have some weight. These people are the products o' hundreds o' years o' wild life in the wilderness, far from the outside world. Most of 'em can't read nor write, and many of 'em ain't been on a train in their lives. Some ain't even seen one. An' the outside world has been represented to 'em in enemies—revenue officers, other servants o' the law. How can they realize it's a crime for 'em to make up some mash from their own corn and make a little corn-likker? The only people from outside has been after 'em. I been after 'em—but they know me.

"So, Mr. McCrann, I know they're scared o' your planes, I 've heard it all around. It'd go bad with yuh if yuh had a landin' anywhere in the mountains. To them those planes 're peekin' down, tryin' to get 'em for somethin'. Would be so, even if yuh hadn't carried the State Police some times. That's one reason I kept so clear o' them ships, every way. Them ships are the law to the mountains. May be foolish, but it's so. They're gentle, simple people by nature, but simple and uncivilized many ways. That's the reason people who don't know, reckon they're so bloodthirsty.

"McCrann, as a friend o' yours I'd advise yuh t' get out before somethin' else happens. Yuh got a sample, and there's a like tuh be more. You're flirtin' with death every time yuh fly over these hills. I know yuh got good prospects, and I'd like to see Poyet County have a flourishin' airyplane company. That's why I offered tuh buy yuh out. I could handle it all right, and instead o' hindrance an' trouble I'd get help from the mountains."

He turned again, and gazed at the blazing McCrann.

"I'll buy yuh lock, stock an' barrel fur eighteen thousand dollars. That'll let yuh get out with a little profit, an' I'll take over yuh're leases. It'll take all my savin's—the taxi business has kept usin' its profits fur extension—but I'll do it because I love this country, I hate tuh see yuh in trouble, and I kind o' hanker to dabble in this flyin'."

"Sorry, but nothing doing!" stated McCrann roughly.

The hypocritical actor, mouthing his high-flown, gently affectionate sentiments, affected the bluff flyer with disgust so profound that it was simply not in his direct nature to camouflage. Berwick lit his pipe noisily and to break the tension said—

"You see Larry here was gassed in the war, and he's got to stay in the mountains and have something he's interested in to take up his time."

"I'd give yuh a good salary to kind o' manage it——"

"No!" barked McCrann.

"Then let me tell yuh somethin'!"

LARKIN'S pipe smashed to the desk, and he leaned forward tensely. His diabolical eyes seemed suffused with red, and Berwick suddenly tensed, his body inclining forward as if to prevent Larkin from leaping at McCrann.

There was an instant when the eyes of McCrann and the sheriff fought a silent battle, and then, unexpectedly, the sheriff relaxed in his chair.

"I ask your pardon, boys," he said gently, drawing a long breath. "Yuh rubbed me the wrong way, McCrann. I'm tryin' tuh be a friend to yuh. But I know you're under a strain. What I was fixin' tuh say was that yuh're liable to have things happen to yuh tuh get yuh out o' this country. The mountains are against yuh. So be careful. An' I was goin' to suggest that I put a deputy guardin' your hangar hyar—your airships are all hyar, I understand. Some o' these fellers that's from the mountains might take a notion to put yuh out o' business."

Berwick, realizing perfectly that in the thinking handicap, he himself was usually going under the wire about the time McCrann's mind broke from the barrier, so

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to speak, cut in before McCrann could say a word.

"That's mighty kind of you, sheriff, and I think it's an excellent precaution."

McCrann's slow but sure mental processes finally reached the same conclusion that Berwick had instinctively arrived at.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, eyes on the floor. He could not have acted his part while looking into Larkin's eyes. "I'm sorry I've been so nasty, but I'm under a pretty heavy strain. The murder of an old friend, and the financial loss, and what you say about my having enemies in the mountains—well, I apologize. And I'm sorry that I must continue to stay on the job. I can't quit now. And thank you for your offer. I appreciate it very much."

"All right, son, all right," the sheriff almost cooed, stroking his mustache slowly. "I'll telephone right now and the deputy can go back with yuh. I'm tryin' to run a hard county right, boys, and because the problems is different the methods must be different. I don't mind bein' misunderstood, if I can jest make Poyet County a little better and save people a little trouble."

He walked out slowly, and they could hear him calling a number. The telephone was in the hall.

Berwick made a casual query as to the population of Brandley, which McCrann caught up easily and answered naturally, although the big flyer's hands were clenching and relaxing nervously. He was maintaining control of himself by main strength. By the time Larkin returned, however, he had succeeded in forcing himself into a more normal condition.

During the few minutes they had to wait for the deputy to arrive, Larkin asked various questions about the recent crime, which Berwick answered, telling the truth in so far as he could. The untruths, apparently, Larkin was not suspicious of; that Berwick's morning trip to Young's Gap had included anything more than inquiries about the body, or that there had been a conference in Whitefield the night before. Berwick told of his meeting with Doctor Gray in St. Louis, but did not give the slightest hint that the doctor was more than normally interested in recent events.

Larkin seemed satisfied, told the story of how he had come to Brandley thirty years before and started to work for a dollar a week, and related amusingly the tale of Aunt Judy's first day in town. She was a very distant relative of his, and had been his housekeeper for years. He proved himself a raconteur of considerable charm, and Berwick, that second self of his like an observer having no part in the scene, was repelled, fascinated, and forced to wonder. In speech and clothing and general attitude he sensed the posing of the man. Later McCrann confirmed Berwick's judgement.

"And don't fail to realize this," Larry said. "Just because you happen to have Larkin placed before you as a crook, remember that to practically everybody else in this county but our little gang, Larkin is possibly an unscrupulous politician, but principally the most efficient sheriff the county ever had, its most famous man, and a shining example!

"Through a combination of circumstances and accidents I figured he was connected with the murder, and between Gray, Walsh and myself we ticketed him. Under any other circumstances, Roj, and except for this murder, not a one of us, I don't believe, would have ever suspected Larkin of anything but rough business methods and strong-arm political campaigns. And we'd have discounted those, as the three towns have been doing for years, because he delivered the goods in bigger ways. And remember this—had it not been for the remarkable coincidence of that forced landing and your arrival by air, Larkin and his men would have got away with their plan as clean as a whistle!"

Berwick, nodding, wondered the more.

"'The best laid plans—'" he quoted, and then went on: "And what I mean is that when talking about best laid plans I'll never forget Larkin's scheme up here. Your mountain product could give most of these well known 'master minds,' cards and spades when it comes to getting the boodle with safety and dispatch!"

XIII

AT TWO O'CLOCK in the morning, four hours after the installation of Deputy Luke Harlow as guard of the Bercrann Field hangar, Berwick was having a hard time to keep his eyes open. As may be deduced from that statement, he was not in bed. As a matter of fact he was flat on the ground behind a clump of bushes, several yards down the road from

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the hangar, in a position which gave him a view of the sliding doors which provided the only entrance to the big shed.

He had walked a matter of nearly three miles, in a huge circle, and crawled nearly a quarter of a mile in order to attain his strategic position without the knowledge of Deputy Luke Harlow, and now that he had attained it he felt more or less foolish. His suspicions seemed exaggerated, unfounded and bizarre.

The deputy paced slowly around the hangar at intervals, but spent most of his time smoking on the small wooden bench set against the hangar, facing the field.

Larkin's suggestion of a guard had brought into bold relief a possibility which had previously occurred to Berwick once or twice but which, in the bustle of fast-coming happenings had been forced into the background of his mind. It was amazingly simple and would be beautifully effective. One man, with an ax, could absolutely ruin every ship in the hangar within five minutes and without making enough noise to be heard twenty-five feet away.

The location was perfect for a project of the kind. The house was a full quarter-mile from the hangar, and there were no other residences for a similar distance. Field and bungalow were on the extreme outskirts of town.

Taking into consideration all the known facts—or what the amateur reformers conceived to be facts—what could be more effective a measure for Larkin to inspire, than to ruin McCrann financially and at the same time get the airplanes out of the way? It would rid Larkin of competition with his taxi business and effectively delay the use of airplanes in procuring a detailed knowledge of what was going on in the mountains. Larkin had been after fair contracts, too, and McCrann would be out of that prospect and the sheriff could step in. That threatening letter had possibly been hinting at the idea, or something similar.

Larkin's offer of a deputy had crystallized the thought in Berwick's machine-like mind. Knowing Larkin's power over his henchmen, and aware of his propensity to mask illegal operations with an effective camouflage of unusual efficiency, the thought had leaped full-grown into his mind that the sheriff's offer might be a deliberate advance alibi for sabotage inspired by Larkin himself.

The sheriff had warned McCrann repeatedly that there was feeling against him, and had even put a deputy on guard without being asked. If the deputy were found bound and gagged and the ships ruined, the benevolent, gentle mountain-sheriff could say "I told you so," and have another feather in his cap as a man who knew his job. The deputy could tell a suitable story, and everything would be tight and investigation-proof, even to deliberately false clues to start with as to the identity of the vandals. And Larkin himself would be the man to investigate the crime.

Berwick sat up, cursed the fact that he could not smoke, and gazed into the darkness with a slight smile on his lips.

"That Larkin's a wonder," he soliloquized "Many criminals get away with stuff in good shape, but to run things the way Larkin does and at the same time not merely get by but actually get a country-wide reputation for unusual efficiency—boy, oh boy."

There was no moon, although the sky was studded with stars. The road was a gray strip discernible for a considerable distance, and against the sky the crests of the encircling mountains loomed black and mysterious like menacing clouds. Except for their peaks the mountains themselves were invisible.

Berwick had shed his expensive tweeds for the greasy flying-clothes, and in his belt were two Colts. He had had a hard job to persuade McCrann to go to bed and let him watch the watchman. It seemed unbelievable to think of McCrann's big, powerful body as a shell for diseased organs within, but as a matter of fact the Irishman was about through unless he got a chance to sleep and ease the strain.

The murder had weighed heavily on him, and the purely physical strain had been too hard, as well. Doctor Gray was on watch up at the house, and a pistol-shot would bring him to the rescue should anything turn up.

Berwick felt his sun-burnt nose gingerly, and was relieved to find it healing already.

"A St. Louis proboscis isn't tough enough for this country," he chuckled to himself, and thought whimsically of his suite at the Masterson and of the surroundings wherein he had met Doctor Gray but two nights before. He sprawled on his back,

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knees in the air and hands behind his head, musing contentedly.

Came the low rumble of a car, and then the steady hiss which indicated a motor that was big and powerful and quiet. Berwick eased himself closer to the bushes and peered through them.

The shadowy car slipped by him like some ghost of the night, and drew up to the hangar, turned, and finally parked facing back toward town. The dim figure of Deputy Luke Harlow approached it, and two men got out.

Berwick drew his guns, and watched. The lights of the car had been dimmed while it was running, but now they were entirely off. He could just make out that the three were close together, and that there was considerable movement.

He could hear a low chuckle, and then the words:

"We'll make it comfortable's possible, Luke. 'T ain't long till morning."

They were binding the willing deputy.

"I'm —— glad they're doing it before instead of afterward," grunted Berwick. "Now if they gag him——"

The more he thought of it the more certain he was that they would. Were he not gagged a few robust yells might bring assistance, and if they intended to make a finished job of the thing they would be compelled to bind him as securely and gag him effectually.

He saw now that there were three men in addition to Harlow. They carried Harlow to the doors, where there was a lengthy pause while they were busy with the lock. Their efforts were successful, for in a few minutes the doors slid back a few feet and they all entered.

Berwick wasted no time. He ran silently toward the hangar, circling to avoid as far as possible being in line with the opening between the doors. He saw a light spring on, sending dim radiance through the opening. They had turned on the one small light the hangar boasted.

A shadow fell across the opening and Berwick dropped to the ground just in time. One of the men shoved the doors to from the inside.

If the ships were to be saved instant action was necessary. Berwick breathlessly cursed the foolishness which had caused him to be almost certain that the attempt, if any, would not be made that night, and the idea that one man could handle it if it came. He had not figured on more than one man besides the deputy.

He stole up to the crack in the door swiftly, sticking his guns in his belt just far enough to hold them. He grasped one door, and with a heave slid it back. The next instant, guns in hand, he filled the doorway.

"Don't move!" he yelled, his voice like a thunderclap in the big hangar.

His eyes took in two men, one with an ax and the other with a heavy sledge, who were arguing, evidently about leaving the light on. Directly in front of him the other man, probably designated as lookout, had turned to put in his word about the light.

The guard had apparently started to turn at the scrape of the door, and as Berwick's words rang out he was half-around, with gun half-drawn.

Whether he was really unable to stop his movement immediately or not Berwick never knew. As the Colt was withdrawn from the man's hip-pocket the flyer shot. The report was deafening as it reverberated from walls and ceiling. The man dropped with a scream.

"Don't move!" snapped Berwick again, his eyes like living flames in his thin, pallid face.

He took a few steps forward until his foot was on the gun which had clattered from the wounded man's hand.

The faces of the two men with the tools were white, frightened, utterly astounded. Berwick kept one gun trained on them while he stooped, watching them unwaveringly, and got the gun under his foot. He did not look at the wounded man, who was now motionless and quiet.

He lay beside the little S.E.5, first ship in the hangar. Toward the rear two Jennies were parked, nose to tail and wings overlapping. The two V-4s were sideways across the hangar, tail to tail, and it was in front of them that the two motionless men were standing, ax and sledge under their arms.

Berwick walked toward them, both guns ready and the third one in his pocket.

Out of the corner of his eye he could see the deputy, lying on the floor close to the wall. He was securely bound and gagged, if appearances were worth anything.

His victims watched him like birds fascinated with horror at the approach of

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a snake. Both were broad-shouldered, brawny men, one of them fairly well-dressed in blue serge and cap and the other one arrayed in nondescript brown coat, light trousers of summer cloth, and a battered straw hat. The larger one, in blue serge, had a hard face, thin-lipped and fleshy, while the shorter and younger man was sullen and furtive-eyed.

"Drop those tools!" commanded Berwick, and they fell with dull thuds to the floor.

"Up with your hands!"

They went up, both pairs of eyes fixed fearfully on the guns.

Searching them would be difficult and unsafe, and there seemed no need for it. He could march them to the house if the doctor was not on the way already.

"Now listen, and get this," said Berwick evenly, standing ten feet from them. "You're going to talk and you're going to come clean. Get that? I saw you tie that brave cop over there, and I come —— near being able to call the man who sent you here. You're both taxi drivers, aren't you?"

Their eyes wavered toward each other, and then the smaller fellow nodded.

"Who sent you here?"

No reply.

"Answer!"

Suddenly the automobile motor outside sprang into life. Berwick startled, backed away from his victims and flashed a look toward the man he had shot.

He was gone. Evidently he had not been too badly wounded to crawl out the door and get into the car. The motor died away down the road.

Tight-lipped and tense, Berwick turned his full attention to the two silent captives.

"Talk, —— you!" he commanded grimly.

The big fellow found his tongue.

"It's a nice night," he said with a sneer.

Berwick smiled.

"Turning out that way for me. Nevertheless, you're going to tell me within the next ten seconds who sent you here. Was it Larkin? Yes or No! Come clean with the whole business!"

He waited for a few seconds and then began to count. As the numbers fell from his tongue the little man's face gradually contorted. The bigger man sneered, and said nothing.

"I'm talking to you, big boy," said Berwick. "Talk!"

"Eight, nine—"

No answer.

"Ten!" and the next instant the Colt spoke.

Berwick did not bluff when as much was at stake as there was then.

With a gurgle the big man dropped like a stone.

"Mister, don't shoot!"

The other outlaw dropped to his knees in an ecstasy of fear that was obscene in its utter abandonment to terror.

"Back up and stand still!" commanded Berwick.

He bent over the wounded man, and groped for a gun. He found a small .32. He hoped he had succeeded in getting him in the shoulder, but he had no time to investigate for a moment.

"I'll tell yuh all I know!" whined the cowed man who was shrinking against the wall. "Honest, it was Larkin——"

Footsteps padded across the ground outside the hangar, and in the door burst McCrann, in trousers, sneakers and pajama coat, with Dr. Gray, in shirtsleeves and vest, behind him.

They stopped short as they took in the scene, gasping for breath. There was a pool of blood at their feet, a man lying wounded behind Berwick, and another against the wall, hands in the air.

"Come right in," Berwick said over his shoulder. "I'm giving a little party."

"Wh-wh-what——"

"One of you search this weasel here and see if he's got a gun, will you?" requested Berwick. "Doc, here's a man I was compelled to caress with my Colt a while back. He probably needs your services, but we haven't much time. There's the brave deputy over there."

McCrann got the gun while the doctor bent over the victim of Berwick's single-hearted devotion to the cause of landing the murderer of Sandy Allison in the hoosegow. Gray bound the shoulder wound with his handkerchief.

"He'll pull through all right. We'll get him out of here and fix him up. Now what happened exactly, son?"

Berwick told the story briefly while unbinding Harlow.

"Let's get these fellows fixed and then make for Larkin. It was Larkin, wasn't it?" he demanded of his unhurt captive.

"Yes sir!" and a torrent of speech flowed

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from the little man's lips. But all he had to tell them, of importance, was that they were there by Larkin's orders. He vowed he knew nothing of the murder. Harlow corroborated the story, and likewise disclaimed any further knowledge.

Berwick and McCrann carried the wounded man while Dr. Gray rode herd with a gun on the two men. At the house they found both Mrs. McCrann and her sister fully dressed and waiting. Mary McCrann was starry-eyed with excitement—no trace of weaknesss there, and Berwick paid her the most sincere—although silent—tribute he had ever vouchsafed one of the fair sex. Ann, looking remarkably pretty without her over-grown goggles, was white and nervous.

The doctor got his hospital and ordered the ambulance immediately. He and McCrann found the rest of their clothing, and in ten minutes they were on the way down town.

"I'll turn this bird over to the staff in a jiffy, and then we'll get Larkin, eh?" he suggested.

His bald head shone dimly, and his round face was red as a beet. He breathed noisily, but behind his glasses his eyes shone with the youthful zest and excitement. McCrann's countenance reflected blissful satisfaction.

"Larkin'll be gone, I'm afraid, but we can try," stated Berwick. "Depends on whether he thinks his men have talked, maybe. That fellow I winged first may tell him the game's up, I suppose. He had over a half-hour's start on us."

"It may not be strictly legal to go get the sheriff of a county at the point of a gun," said the doctor with a boyish chuckle in his throaty voice, "but I'll take the responsibility. We won't fool with any police help. Then we'll turn these fellows here over to Sam Walton, and by the time Sam gets through with them he may have enough dope to make a few more arrests among the Larkin taxi drivers."

"I sure hope Larkin's at home," remarked McCrann prayerfully.

"That's unanimous," said Berwick. "But I hae me doots."

The chauffeur attended strictly to his knitting, and the ambulance swerved around the corners with bell clanging and covered the straight stretches with no delay whatever. The car finally drew up before a big white building set on a terrace. A white-coated doctor and another attendant were coming out the door almost before the ambulance stopped, and in a few seconds the wounded man was on a stretcher.

"Simpson, get your gun and guard the door on this man. He's a criminal," ordered Gray crisply. "Dr. Kay, there's nothing but a shoulder wound, although fairly well down. It won't give you any trouble. Clark, drive us to the home of Sheriff Larkin and approach it quietly."

It was a short drive to the domicile of the sheriff, and the ambulance rolled quietly to a stop. There was a light in the rear of the house on the lower floor.

"You come with us," Berwick ordered the silent, unhappy captives. "Somebody'd better take the back door, I suppose——"

"I will," offered McCrann. "If he gets through me I'll die of a broken heart right on the spot."

The big Irishman disappeared around the house, and Berwick, the doctor and their prisoners walked up on the tiny veranda and rang the bell. They waited briefly for an answer, then rang again. Finally Berwick beat a tattoo with his gun.

Shuffling steps in the hall—the door opened a crack, and then was flung wide. In the doorway was the old housekeeper, and for an amazed interval Berwick could say or do nothing.

The old woman's face was convulsed, snarling, beastlike. Her bleared eyes were blazing with unholy rage, and the thin, wrinkled face was contorted terribly. The bloodless lips were drawn back over the toothless gums.

"Too late!" she screamed shrilly. "May God's curse be on yuh, every one o' yuh, an'——"

"Here, be still!" snapped the doctor, stepping in the door and grasping the crone by the arm. "Stop, I say!"

Berwick and Larkin's employee followed and shut the door.

The old woman drew a leathery hand across her drooling mouth.

"You druv Obe away! The kindest, best—curse yuh!"

Scream after scream stabbed through the night, until the doctor grasped her with one arm and put his hand over her mouth. She fought like a wildcat, and then, as suddenly as if she had fainted, relaxed and was silent.

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"Where's Sheriff Larkin?" asked Berwick quietly.

"Gone, thank God! Gone, and yuh'll never get 'im! He ain't here!"

The maniacal eyes were still glowing strangely, and she was looking around as though she did not really see the men surrounding her.

"Made for the mountains," said Berwick. "I was afraid so."

"Slipped yuh, didn't he?" she gloated.

Suddenly she turned and hobbled to the kitchen. In an instant she reappeared with a long rifle.

"Git out o' this house!" she screamed. "Out o' that door, yuh skunks! Out! Out!"

Her voice began rising in hysteria again, and Doctor Gray turned quickly.

"We'd better go," he said, and led the way out the door.

"We'll have to get him when we get Jeff Calhoun, because they'll be together up there—where Jeff has squatted and laughed at the rest of us for fifteen years! Let's go get Sam now and get things under way."

"Nothing doing, Larry!" called Berwick. "Come on!"

Curious heads were beginning to pop forth from surrounding windows, and lights flashed on in various houses. McCrann came around the house, his face comical in its disappointment, and asked disgusted questions. In a moment the ambulance was bound for the residence of the district attorney.

"The size of it is that this fellow who escaped my clutches after I thought I had him just about scared Larkin to death," remarked Berwick as they jounced along. "He overheard some of the things I told the other two, and the fact that I was on guard right after Larkin had put a deputy on was almost a certain indication to Larkin that his part in this little frame-up was pretty well known. Added to Larry's peculiar actions when we interviewed the sheriff a few hours ago, I don't wonder the boy felt himself slipping. And of course, he can always say that it wasn't flight—put it that he had gone to the mountains on official business with no idea of flight at all."

The disgruntled McCrann agreed with a grunt, and the doctor nodded as they drew up before the residence of the Honorable Samuel Walton.

"Larkin'll always have more'n one string to his bow," said Gray. "Official business would save his face if he found later that his fright wasn't well-founded. He ought to know how —— well-founded it is—he wouldn't stop at Jeff Calhoun's!"

By dint of noisy efforts they were finally received in the drawing-room of a large and ornate residence by an impressive-looking, if sleepy, man whose iron-gray hair stuck up like a porcupine's quills. He was in pajamas, bathrobe and slippers. The sleep was soon gone from his keen gray eyes, however, and the massive, square face was alight with eagerness as he heard the story.

"Wait till I get dressed. What time is it? Three-thirty, eh? All right. We'll go to the office and get under way. Be back in a second."

The big body of the county prosecutor bounded up the stairs two at a time, and the querulous inquiries of Mrs. Walton could be heard, answered by a brief explosion of speech on the part of her better half.

"Opportunity is a funny thing," observed Doctor Gray. "This business will probably land Sam Walton as either governor or attorney general next year."

"I wonder if all reformers keep such long hours?" sighed Berwick, his lean length hunched down in his chair.

"Or have so much fun?" added the doctor with twinkling eyes.

XIV

MUCH had been accomplished by nine o'clock that morning. The prisoner, whose name was Herrick, finally owned to being wanted in Richmond for forgery, and his eager evidence was sufficient to cause Walton to apply for warrants for four other employees of the Larkin trucking business. Herrick knew nothing of the murder, but his testimony as to Larkin's responsibility for the attempt on McCrann's ships was definite, and he was able to furnish one or two items of general information regarding mysterious activities of some of Larkin's men. Harlow could give no further testimony of any importance, although palpably anxious to tell all he knew and escape lightly.

At eight o'clock, a council of war having been held, McCrann, Walton, the mayor of Brandley and two prominent citizens surrounded the telephone in Walton's office and helped convince Colonel Payne, out at Cook

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Field in Dayton, Ohio, that there was a serious emergency which must be met. As a result of their efforts Lieutenant Harvey Harrison, chief test-pilot of the Army Air Service, on a multi-motored ship took off in a Martin Bomber with a load consisting of two Lewis machine guns, many magazines of ammunition, and Mr. Jack Harding, civilian expert whose specialty was the installing and keeping in order of machine guns and the delicate C. C. tripping gears whereby a machine gun shoots its bullets through a whirling propeller.

Berwick took off for Young's Gap, made a third landing on the main and only street of that thriving metropolis, procured the patriarchal Mr. Peters and two horses, and started in search of Jim Chatfield.

He found the melancholy chieftain at his own cabin— five miles further in the mountains than the previous meeting place—and they went into executive session. It was decided that Chatfield, at the head of eighteen good shots and veteran haters of the Calhoun clan, was to start late that afternoon for Kinsey, the tiny settlement which was headquarters of the rival clan.

They were to dispose themselves between Kinsey and the crest of Great Cliff Mountain, thus cutting off the retreat of the Calhouns to the twin cliffs which provided a natural fortress for them. The town posse was to be on the other side of the village, and both parties were to take their orders from Berwick by a system of signals which he expounded at length to Chatfield. Business was to start early in the morning—it would take practically all night to get there.

Chatfield agreed with the judgment of the town men, who declared with certainty that Larkin, who was originally of a family loosely allied with the Calhouns, had gone to join Jeff Calhoun, realizing that his game was up. They were also certain that the leader of the Calhouns, Harley and Fosset, with Larkin almost a certainty, would probably be at the head of several dozen men composing the Calhoun clan.

Stretching southwest from Great Cliff Mountain was a tract of tens of thousands of acres which were absolutely uninhabited. The top of Great Cliff had been the scene of battles before, in which the mountaineers of the Calhoun Clan had laughed at revenue officers and sheriffs' posses alike, taking heavy toll of them and then, if hard-pressed, disappearing back into that pathless wilderness and jeering at pursuit.

It was a certainty that Jeff Calhoun and Harley and Fosset had not fled any further than Kinsey, relying on lack of evidence against them and on Larkin's expert and powerful aid. It had been a long time since those mountains had been scoured by the law, and it had never been done successfully. It was at once their home territory and their most hopeful haven. With the Chatfields on the ground and a machine gun in the air, though, Berwick, who was already becoming impregnated with some of the spirit of that mountain country and its traditions, felt that the Calhouns were facing their Waterloo.

He was back in Brandley at four o'clock for the funeral of Sandy Allison. Brandley, afire with the wildest of rumors which included everything from an attack by the mountain people on the town to the supposed murder of Sheriff Larkin, turned out *en masse* for that funeral.

Curious crowds filed past the coffin and looked briefly down at the still body. The top of the head and upper face had been bandaged, of necessity, and nothing but the lower portion of the dead pilot's countenance could be seen. Men's faces set and mouths tightened as their imaginations pictured the story behind that broken body—if there were faint hearts there, all weakness was swept away. There could be no question as to the deadly purpose of the fifty picked men who were to wend their way toward the Calhoun stronghold.

Berwick, McCrann and Harrison, who had arrived shortly after noon, flew above the long procession and one by one dipped down over the open grave and dropped flowers like rain. An escort from the American Legion fired the last salute, and then above the grave a bugler sent the haunting notes of "Taps" shivering through the quiet sunlit air. As he finished, another bugle repeated it from the hill a few hundred yards away, and finally a third one, far out of sight below the hill, blew the last echo, the notes dim and faint and unutterably pathetic in the distance. So the last honors were paid to the youngster whose sacrifice had awakened Poyet County.

Shortly afterward the posse, led by competent guides, started for their rendezvous. Before dawn Kinsey would be surrounded—the Chatfields cutting off retreat toward

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the twin cliffs which was the fighting base of the Calhoun fugitives, and the town men closing on the town from the other side. McCrann was with the posse, as was Doctor Gray and Walsh, who had brought twenty men with him from Whitefield. Berwick, Harrison, Slater and the Cook Field mechanic started to work getting one of the guns mounted and geared on Berwick's ship.

During dinner that night Walton called up and told Berwick the latest developments.

"Heard from Cleveland—identification absolute," the D. A. said jubilantly. "The plane, a second-hand one, was bought by a man answering Harley's description exactly, although a different name was given. McManus found the mine man who suggested shipping the money by air without trouble, and we've got him cold. He's been handling moonshine among the miners for Larkin, and told all he knew. He had no idea of the projected robbery or murder, according to McManus. He and Larkin were talking over the phone and Larkin himself made the suggestion which this fellow passed on to Gillet, the superintendent. Haven't got the bank man yet, but we'll have him. And I finally made up my mind that some of our fish might slip the net so I've subpenaed every last one of Larkin's drivers.

"The police in all three towns are singing low, Mr. Berwick, and the entire organization is worried and uncertain. Public opinion is running high. These men don't like to stick around and they don't dare move, so they're sitting tight and hoping. Never saw anything loosen up so fast in my life. Every minute something new is coming in, and there'll be a haul within the next few days that'll be a front-page spread in every paper in the country and involve every corner of this county!"

The bubbling district attorney was plainly in his element, and Berwick had no fear of his bungling his job. Already Federal and State assistance had been enlisted, and there seemed no reason to doubt that the minor parts in the Larkin criminal machinery would be well in hand.

AS HE played bridge with the two girls and Harrison that evening it seemed incongruous, almost impossible to believe that up in the hills over a hundred armed men were stealthily making their way toward the lonely stronghold of the Calhouns, prepared to take them dead or alive. Once again Berwick paid a silent tribute to the spirit of Larry's wife, for not a sign did she give that she was wondering and worrying about Larry, on his way through the mountains for a battle on the morrow.

It was still dark as pitch when Mrs. McCrann's knock on the door awakened Berwick.

"Three-thirty!" she informed him. "And breakfast is about to be served!"

Harrison, downcast because he could not take part in coming events, was nevertheless on hand for the hasty meal, and before the eastern sky had changed from gray to blue, was helping Berwick and Slater get the scout out of the hangar and warming up. At four-fifteen Berwick took off, circled the field a few times, dipped low past the McCrann bungalow and waved to Mrs. McCrann and Ann, and then turned toward the hills behind which, dim and vague in the morning mist, Great Cliff Mountain towered regally over its surroundings like a king in the midst of his kneeling courtiers.

The air was cool and smooth, and the ship raced buoyantly toward its goal, which grew more and more distinct with every passing moment. Soon Roj could make out the peculiar formation which gave the mountain its name and likewise provided the Calhouns with their natural fortress. The crest of the mountain was a huge perpendicular cliff, perhaps three hundred feet high and a quarter of a mile wide. It was split in the center by a gorge, as if sheared cleanly by some giant's ax. The heavily-wooded slope of the mountain swelled to meet the base of the cliff, but Berwick could see that two ravines seemed to encircle the mountain, their bottoms a mass of tangled undergrowth, rocks, and towering trees.

The narrow road which led up the side of the mountain wandered for miles like a snake finding its path. Berwick remembered that the posse was to follow the road a good part of the way and then depart from it lest Calhoun sentinels give the alarm.

"I guess I've got the easiest job, at that," he reflected, looking down at the wilderness below.

The pursuers were relying on their belief that the Calhouns would not be looking

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for any immediate attempt to capture them. It was probable that Jeff Calhoun and his aids were relying absolutely on two things—the possibility that they were not connected with the murder at all, or, if they were, that Larkin would protect them. There was no way for the fugitives to learn of developments in the three towns until Larkin's arrival. Larkin himself, while undoubtedly with the Calhouns, was nevertheless not certain that his machinations were fully known, and would probably believe that pursuit—at least immediate pursuit—was unlikely.

That mountain, and the Calhouns, had been a bad proposition for too many years. They had been left alone of necessity. It seemed reasonable to believe that the fugitives had not yet disappeared southward, but were among their friends as yet, waiting to hear of developments down below. In fact, Larkin had taken time to phone his office before leaving, that he was going unexpectedly on a murder case. He had fled because he thought his captured men *might* talk, because his informant knew nothing more than that Berwick had taken them in tow. And Larkin did not know that he was connected with the murder of Allison in any way.

The altimeter read twenty-five hundred feet now, and the S.E. was over the second cañon which guarded the approach to Kinsey. From this cañon the mountain rose steeply, flattened slightly a mile from the base of the cliff, and then rose gradually to it. Somewhere on that natural shelf, directly below the cliffs, was Kinsey.

Smoke drifting lazily in the air caught Berwick's eye. Although he was three thousand feet high, he was just about level with the town. He circled a few times and opened the motor wide to get his altitude quickly. When he was even with the top of the cliffs he banked around and made his way straight for the collection of cabins which was now in sight.

In his hand he had a note, wrapped around a stone, stating that the town was surrounded, that he had a machine-gun on his ship, and calling on Jeff Calhoun, Harley, Fosset and Larkin to surrender. It left no doubt of the extent of the posse's information. He conned the earth to find the posse, but could not see them. He wondered what had happened—surely some of them would be in sight.

He finally decided to go on—perhaps they had crept closer to the settlement. In a moment he was flying five hundred feet above Kinsey.

The street, if street it could be called, was populated with women and children—a group of perhaps thirty of them, and around them was a cordon of four men with guns. Berwick, puzzled, went into a dive to get a closer look. He glanced toward the cliffs, and suddenly the explanation came to him.

Came a puff of smoke as he watched, from the cliff, and it was answered from below. The Calhouns had been warned, or else had considered discretion the better part of valor and taken to the cliffs before the arrival of the Chatfields. The battle had started. The posse from town had herded the women and children together and were guarding them, for the women of the mountains often handle a mean rifle themselves.

Now he could see the toll that had been taken of the Chatfields. Far to one side, under cover of a low embankment, lay several men, either wounded or dead. The skirmish line of the Calhouns' enemies encircled the cliffs as far as possible, but Berwick speedily took in the full beauty of the Calhouns' battleground. From each end of the giant rock gullies ran down the mountain, seeming at least a hundred feet deep. The walls were precipitous, and without growth of any kind. The cliff could not be surrounded except by going miles down the mountain, or else crossing the gullies. And crossing them was sure death, for there was no cover to screen a man from the deadly rifles above.

That rift in the cliff was the only possible path by which the crest could be attained. Twenty-five or thirty men were hiding along the cliff, and the attacking forces were under cover. Occasional shots were marked by smoke, but they came infrequently.

From their eyrie the Calhouns could tell whether their enemies were starting to surround them, undoubtedly, in plenty of time to make a retreat into the vast wilderness behind them. Meanwhile they were doing as much damage as possible until that time came.

It was Berwick's move—he knew that below him his allies were waiting exultantly now that he had come. That was the reason they had not started the long encircling movement—they relied on him to make it unnecessary.

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The S. E. circled above the now excited Calhouns as the flyer sized up the land. The top of the cliff was broken into jagged points and shallow depressions, with here and there deep fissures. The gorge which split it was deep on each end, but rose to within a few feet of the top of the cliff at its center.

On the opposite side from the attacking party the forest came within a hundred yards of the base of the cliff. Outcroppings of rock seemed to indicate that the clearing was a natural one due to the rocky formation. Stunted bushes had found a foot-hold here and there. The wall of the cliff on this side seemed to be a negative slope or else the base was slightly hollowed out.

As Berwick made his decision his eye caught a man who had wormed his way closer than his comrades to the stronghold of the Calhouns, and as Berwick watched he saw the mountaineer peer up at the top of the cliff from behind his tree. Then he spun half-around, and dropped to the ground. Some Calhoun had been on the alert.

Berwick circled, even with the line of the cliff, and as he straightened sent his little ship shrilling downward in a steep dive. At a hundred and fifty miles an hour the scout flashed earthward, head on into twenty threatening rifles which were speaking already. It was hard to realize that the S.E. was roaring along through a hail of bullets, for the motor, of course, drowned out all other noises.

A hundred feet from the cliff, and fifty feet higher than its crest, Berwick drew level and threw his rock-weighted note. He drew a sigh of relief as he saw it lodge in a crevice. He zoomed upward and turned to get out of range of those bullets. The zoom carried him five hundred feet in the air and in a moment he was circling and watching. The note, while referring to the surrounding of Kinsey, still would give all the needed facts.

"Three men lie flat on the ground as a signal of surrender and pile all rifles in a heap," the note directed.

It was several minutes before any one started after it. The airplane had apparently brought consternation into the ranks of the fugitives. It was possible that they thought Berwick had dropped a bomb of some sort. At length a man started for the place where it had fallen. The flyer, scrutinizing the group closely, thought he could pick out Larkin—at least there was a man in black down there.

Leaving perhaps ten men at the edge of the cliff to guard their stronghold, the rest of the group gathered into a knot. Berwick waited to see whether the demand for surrender would be obeyed—hoping devoutly that it would. He could run that gantlet again, with his guns spitting a shower of death, but he hated the thought.

The group scattered—and there was no signal.

Spiraling lower, he saw them picking up what seemed to be packages cached at various places in the cliff. Then, in a stream of men, they rushed for the fissure which was the path to that wilderness in the rear. A dozen men still manned the cliff, acting as rear-guard.

Without hesitation the S.E. curved upward, over on its back, and swooped out again, less than a hundred feet higher than the stronghold of the Calhoun's. That loop meant that the foe was retreating. Banking swiftly, he straightened until he was parallel with the edge of the cliff, where those dozen men were waiting. He could see his own force on the move, forward. They came at a run, while the guns above took wicked toll.

DOWN came the S.E., and Berwick, squinting over the gun before him, pressed the control on his stick. The ship vibrated to the drumming machine-gun, and a hail of death swept the edge of the cliff as the ship, pointed steeply downward, swept over it. At the further edge it was barely twenty feet above the rock, so steep had the dive been.

He made a climbing turn upward and turned to see his terrible handiwork. Four men lay where they had been, two others were dragging themselves toward the path to safety, and the rest, evidently protected from the bullets by outcropping rock, seemed unhurt. The party had sent six of the attacking posse to earth before routed by the machine-gun.

It was slow work to climb down into the cleft in the rock—four or five besides the rear-guard were still waiting their turn. The floor of the gorge was a tumbled mass of rock, too, and progress was slow. Berwick hoped to see the signal of surrender, but there was none. On the other side the leaders of the posse were close to the path now.

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Berwick, his eyes blazing behind his goggles, shot over the cliff and waited for his first victim to come out. Despite those men lying dead over there on the other side, and Sandy Allison, he could not bring himself to fire into the mob again, for in that narrow gorge he could mow them all down.

Came a sputter from the motor, then a miss, and finally a series of loud reports. The pilot's face, white beneath the grime, gave no other sign that Berwick realized what had happened. The motor was failing.

It had not quit entirely, but was sputtering and missing on one bank of cylinders. The rotations per minute dropped, and even when he opened the motor wide, nine hundred was the best it would do—and that was far from enough to keep the ship in the air.

He was eight hundred feet high—and there was no place to land save that rocky clearing, half-covered with bushes.

At that moment the first of the fugitives clambered down out of the cleft in the cliff. Automatically Berwick nosed over farther—he was already in a gradual dive to keep flying speed—and pointed for the outlet from the cliff. The Lewis sprayed bullets, and two men fell.

He came out of the dive at five hundred feet, and succeeded in gaining back a hundred precious feet with his extra speed and the limping motor. He should have been using his altitude to maneuver for the best possible landing, but then the Calhouns would have an opportunity to reach the forest, and escape.

He was four hundred feet high as he again pointed toward the opening. The fugitives had been halted by the death of the first two who had emerged from the shelter of the rocky pass, but finally they tried again. Four of them burst into the open, and once again the crippled ship swept down on them, raining lead.

Back at the mouth of the trail three men hurled themselves to the ground—with their foes coming from the rear and the ship holding the other side, they were surrendering.

Berwick breathed his satisfaction through clenched teeth as the scout zoomed upward once more and he succeeded in negotiating a turn before stalling on top of the chandelle. Three hundred feet high now, and the motor had dropped to seven hundred revolutions.

He was headed directly away from the cliff as he went into his dive, and he looked over the side of the ship to figure his best place to crack up. Then he saw one isolated figure running across the clearing. Somebody was running the gantlet rather than be captured, and he wore black trousers, a white shirt—and a black tie flapped behind him.

It was Larkin.

All thought of the landing disappeared from Berwick's mind. He nosed over steeply, losing precious altitude every second, and bore down on that fleeing man who was responsible, directly or indirectly, for the tragic happenings of the last three days. Berwick got his bead on him while Larkin was still forty yards or more from shelter. He pressed the machine-gun control-lever on his stick, but there was no answer.

The magazine was empty, and there was no time to change.

Without any conscious process of reasoning Berwick steepened his dive. Twenty feet from the ground he was coming level, and the air-speed meter was registering a hundred and forty miles an hour. He cut the switches, and with head over the side, still diving gradually until the landing gear was sweeping the bushes, he darted at his prey. Twenty yards from the edge of the forest he made a last dip downward, and the slightest of jars told him that his landing gear had struck Larkin. By some miracle the propeller had not hit him, and was still intact.

That queer second self of Berwick's was telling him that he was flying for his life, and it was an effort worthy of the man who had bested von Krutoffen in single combat. Back came the stick, and ever so little right rudder went on. In a sweeping wing-turn the scout darted upward and to the right in a curving zoom. Near the top more right rudder as the stick eased forward.

The nose dropped as the ship completed the turn back toward the clearing. Berwick jockeyed it as it stalled downward from a hundred feet, and twenty feet high had it in control. He had wing-turned off the ground, practically, doing a ninety-degree turn. There is no better flying.

During those last few seconds he whirled the stabilizer back like mad to aid in keeping

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the nose up. Ahead were tumbled boulders and tangled bushes. He stalled down, and hit with a crash. A big rock wiped off the landing gear and the lazily whirling propeller splintered with a crash. The tail flipped into the air as the nose plowed into the bushes.

Instinctively Berwick relaxed, hunched down in his seat, and drew his head as far down between his shoulders as possible. There was an instant when the earth whirled past as if he had been doing a front-flip from a spring-board. He found himself hanging on his belt, upside down, his face scratched painfully by the bushes.

With a great sigh of relief he let his head drop. It had not moved a half-inch when it was stopped by a rock. That half-inch had been the measure of his escape from a fractured skull.

With one hand supporting him he loosened his belt and crumpled to the ground. He found he could do nothing—between his long legs and the maze of stick, rudder, wire and linen he was helpless to extricate himself.

"Coming Roj! Are you all right?" roared some one—it was McCrann.

The next moment the tail of the gallant little scout was lifted, and revealed a slim young man resting approximately on the tip of his left ear.

Larry McCrann cursed steadily and blasphemously for a full-half-minute while tears stood in his eyes.

"I didn't know I was so much of a cripple that I have to cry to relieve my feelings," he rumbled. "Roj, you're nothing but a —— fool!"

As Berwick removed his helmet and spit some assorted twigs and dirt out of his mouth he glanced over at the motley group forming alongside the entrance to the path. The remainder of the Calhouns unarmed, were coming forth, each under the escort of one or more of the representatives of the Government in the case of Poyet County vs. Larkin, Jeff Calhoun and accomplices.

"Well, we got 'em, and that's the main thing," he stated. "Let's go and see if that was really Larkin I got at the last."

Doctor Gray, falling in behind them as they started for the body that lay alone on the other side of the clearing, smiled slightly and said—

"I always have hankered to see an ace in action, and I got my wish!"

XV

IT WAS Larkin, and he was as gruesome a sight as his victim, Allison, had been.

The toll taken by the Chatfields was two dead and ten wounded, one seriously. Berwick, single-handed, had accounted for four dead, besides Larkin and seven wounded. Jeff Calhoun had been one of the rear-guard left on the cliff, four of whom Berwick had wounded in that flight of his across them. Jeff Calhoun was one of them, wounded in shoulder and left leg.

All the injured were taken to Kinsey where Dr. Gray, who had thoughtfully brought along instruments and bandages in addition to an interne, worked over friend and foe alike. Harley, Jeff Calhoun and Fosset were taken to Brandley, but the remainder of the Calhoun clan, after considerable consultation on the part of the forces of the law, were left in Kinsey under the guardianship of ten volunteers.

The entire settlement was searched for weapons and ammunition. The Calhouns, however, were thoroughly cowed. Fromer, who had been designated by District Attorney Walton as official chief of the expedition, explained to them that they would have to stand trial later. The mountaineers, hopeless and downcast, realized that the end had come, and that it was now a case of getting off as easily as possible.

The Chatfields were gathered together and lectured briefly but forcibly by Fromer, who was a big man of middle age with a reputation that had been glowing undimmed since his tenure of the sheriff's office ten years before.

"You're free and clear now, and will remain so as long as you behave yourselves," he concluded, his hard gray eyes flitting from face to face. The remainder of the posse was at Fromer's back. "You've wiped your record clean today, but you can see for yourselves that the day has passed when you people of the mountains can be a law to yourselves and kill each other off as you see fit. This feud stuff don't go any longer. Jim Chatfield, you see to it that the Chatfield clan settle down like human beings, hear me? If you don't, what

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happened to the Calhouns will happen to you. How about it?"

There was an instant of silence, and all eyes turned to the gawky, sad-looking chieftain, whose long rifle was slung so lovingly under his arm.

"I reckon the Chatfields is satisfied," he drawled at length. "C'mon, boys."

Silently the ragged crew, rifles in hand, shuffled off and disappeared into the forest.

The forces of the law moved with record-breaking speed down in Brandley. Within a month Jeff Calhoun, silent to the last, had been condemned to death and Harley, by virtue of the fact that he had told all he knew, was given fifteen years in prison. Their conviction was a foregone conclusion. Walton's detectives had found the teller in the Brandley Bank responsible for the failure of the bank to ship the pay-roll money. He had confessed that he was under Larkin's thumb because of the fact that some time before he had been caught in one of the dives which were patronized by the miners.

Walton found several of them—dance halls located outside of town limits where the girls got the miners drunk on doctored moonshine and then "rolled" them for their week's pay. The teller was a married man, and Larkin had used his knowledge to force the teller apparently to make a mistake whereby the shipment of money missed the train. The bank man swore, however, that he had no knowledge of Larkin's reasons for the command, which seemed reasonable to the court and resulted in the chastened young benedict being given a suspended sentence and sent forth to live a better life—so long as he was married, at least.

Harley swore that he had decided to come back to Poyet County, had gone to see Larkin, and had entered into partnership with Larkin to get a ship and fly at the summer fairs. Harley was absolutely without funds, and Larkin had supplied them. Harley had accepted the proposition to fly Calhoun for the murder, and the money was to be divided equally between Calhoun, Harley and the two mountaineers who had been on watch on the mountain.

Larkin was not to share in it—his object was to get McCrann out of Poyet County. The two ground men were both members of the Calhoun clan—one of them had been killed and the other one wounded. The wounded man was given twenty years. Harley stated that when Larkin arrived at Kinsey in his flight he had promised them all two thousand dollars apiece to compensate for the fact that the money had not been in the ship.

Several "wanted" men were unearthed among Larkin's drivers, and it was learned that Poyet County and Larkin had been whispered around the principal cities of four states as an excellent hide-away proposition. The chiefs of police of the Three Towns were given a chance to resign, and took it, rather than be tried for neglect of duty. There was practically a clean sweep of deputy-sheriffs and prohibition-enforcement officers.

Other ramifications included the unearthing of Larkin's connection with the dives which were running full-blast around the county for the miners' benefit. They were perfect replicas of the crude dance-halls of pioneer days—and as rough in their work. Larkin owned every one.

IT WAS six weeks, to a day, from the time of Berwick's arrival in Poyet County to when his usefulness as a witness was over, and the readjustment of conditions was practically complete. The tall Missourian was seated on the veranda of the McCrann bungalow with his host and hostess in the late afternoon, their eyes commanding a vista which included the busy Slater at work on one of the big V-4s.

Berwick had been doing a lot of flying for McCrann, to pass the time away and to tide the Irishman over until the arrival of "Dink" Dougherty, old time squadron mate of both of them, who had accepted a job from his old comrade. Dougherty was to arrive that evening.

"Well, Larry," said Berwick at length, "it sure looks as though you're set. With the leading men of the Three Towns having stock in your aerial doings and planning to expand them, and you on that nice fat salary and percentage, your bankroll ought to get healthy as fast as your lungs."

Larry grinned widely.

"Sure looks that way. It was a surprize to me when Doc Gray broached the proposition. Twenty thousand capital and five hundred a month salary plus a percentage—as I told you, all that bothers me is the

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thought that maybe they're doing it out of gratitude, so to speak, although you——"

"Forget it," interrupted Berwick, waving his pipe airily. "The mayor told me that it's the greatest advertisement this county could have, and it's going to become a public utility. Furthermore, there's money in it. As for your split on it—the company takes over your ships at a fair valuation, doesn't it? You supply the technical skill in addition to flying, don't you? As for salary, don't forget this: Flying is a —— good sport, but as a business it can't be overpaid!"

Mrs. McCrann smiled at the slouching flyer. Berwick had changed in those six weeks, and it was a change that went deeper than tanned face and slightly calloused hands. The lazy eyes had lost a hint of dullness that had been in them, and tiny weather-crinkles around them had replaced the fine-traced lines of discontent which had marked his thin face.

"Funny thing," mused Berwick with the grin that appeared more often of late. "Now that the city waster has been out in the great outdoors for six weeks, helped overturn the forces of evil, and all that stuff, I suppose the time's come when he should take a good breath of clean air and spout something about finding himself at last."

"Absolutely," grinned McCrann.

"Instead of which noble sentiments, listen. I wouldn't stay in this forsaken wilderness if you'd give me every mountain in West Virginia with four towns thrown in. I yearn for the city and the pleasures thereof. Tomorrow I'm going to say goodby for a while to the only married couple I ever knew that I envy, then I'm going to get aboard a Pullman bound for New York, and the next night is going to find me pensioning a scalper for a front row seat at the girliest show in the big village. Later I shall probably steer some fair young food-pup to a cabaret. I'm sick of God's great outdoors, and I'm bound for man's great city!"

DIPSEY'S RESOLUTION

by **Gordon Seagrove**

IF EVER I follows the ships again
To gather my spuds an' cakes,
I'll never be workin' a deep-sea hack;
It's me for the Lakes—the Lakes.

They give you a berth what's really a berth;
An' the jaw that the skipper takes—
(No end, I swear.) It's a wonderful life
On the packets that sail the Lakes.

The runs are short, an' the mates are kind;
Their cuss is "Fer Goodness Sakes!"
They're gents—but they handle a ship for fair,
So it's me for the windy Lakes.

The gales are fierce, an' the seas are short
An' the lee's full of country jakes;
But the cabin's warm an' the food is great;
To hell with the sea—the Lakes!

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by Stanley Johnson

THE shadow of the mountain lay toward the mine that early morning, the hideous bald slope in front appearing almost gentle in the gray shadows. Later, a terrific heat would be generated in that narrow slit of our Benguet hills, for, though in the tropics the mountains cool at night, the day falls upon them like burning oil.

At the mouth of one of the tunnels a group of Filipino workmen, squatting on their haunches, waited for young Egdon to come from the office. They gesticulated and gabbled excitedly about the disaster of the previous day.

It was the old story. Since running into the rotted, fibrous rock, the lateral connecting shafts had been caving in with disgusting regularity, and the day before we had witnessed a narrow escape for one of our crews.

As young Egdon and his father came down the rocky path to take charge of clearing the débris, the natives rose and touched their hats—a deference paid perhaps to few Americans—not even to me, the paymaster. But Egdon, junior, had gained their enthusiastic respect by the unquestionable courage he had displayed on more than one occasion of disaster—a respect the more surprizing in that the young man appeared more intellectual than commanding, more fitted for office work than for the rough tasks at the mine.

We had said of him that he would never stand the sun, that his nerve would break in the terrible ordeal of jungle silence, and especially that a college education was no equipment for withstanding malaria and dengue.

Indeed as he stepped forward, it was apparent from his fine, open features that only a tremendous will had driven him through the past year—he had missed too many boats—he had been in the tropics too long. But as usual he took quiet command of the situation, under the proud of eye of Egdon senior, the grayed and weathered general foreman of the Benguet Mines, who was gradually yielding control to his son.

"We'll leave the men here," said young Egdon as he stepped forward, "you'd better stay with them until I look over the damage."

His father smiled slightly.

"We'll leave the men here," he replied, "but I'll go along. There's no use taking risks."

The two men then proceeded with lighted lanterns into the damp and crumbling tunnel, well aware of the habit of the rock in sending down further débris after an initial cave-in.

Pick in hand they crawled over the fallen rock toward the center of the hill. The débris, as I discovered afterward, had dropped in irregular piles, none of which reached the roof of the gallery, so their progress was a series of scrambles up these slopes and squeezes over the summits, down the other side. Near the second vertical shaft they were stopped by a last pile. They could just peer over the top of it—the light of day was visible again. Suddenly there was a slide behind and they were shut in.

In almost total darkness, they knew only

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that behind them was a seemingly solid wall of ragged stone, lighted dimly by their lanterns. In front there was the glimmer of daylight. They called in vain, their voices filling the small chamber but ricocheting feebly through that crevice.

There was only one way and that lay ahead. Crawling up the rough slope they breathed in the light and air. Then they set to work blindly with their picks. It was smothering work—one of them digging while the other squeezed aside.

Finally they had a space smoothed off on top of the pile sufficiently large for both their bodies and could work side by side in the welcome light which was pouring in. Then a pick went through a rotten stone and an enormous tarantula leaped out and sprang away into the darkness behind. They started to crawl.

Finding it impossible to make progress on their bellies, they turned over and lifted their weight forward by grasping the stones above. The father was in front when he found himself stuck and unable to move forward or back. Twist and strain as he might, he was held fast. Young Egdon crept up beside him, and, though it was a tight place for investigation, found that his father's belt had caught in the rocks. He set to work to free it.

Then chancing to glance upward, his eyes fell upon the most blood-curdling sight. In the pocket above, within six inches of his father's face, sat a tarantula, its horrible eyes seemingly fastened upon him. Perhaps it was blinded by the light, perhaps afraid, perhaps waiting to spring. The young man was paralyzed with fear. Mutual comprehension communicated in their tense breathing. Neither of them dared move.

The horror of that position was supreme. Death in a repulsive shape within six inches of their eyes—sure to be dislodged by a careless breath. They feared to cry out—feared to breathe.

When the first thrill of horror passed, they became fascinated, charmed. They could not draw away their eyes from the bloated, hairy skin, the leering blotches, the poisonous sheen of its legs—within six inches of their faces, directly over them.

Finally young Egdon felt his father's muscles tighten slowly—slowly. The old man was trying to draw himself from beneath it. His muscles tightened—he was vibrating with his effort. Then at the futility—his breath escaped in a gasp.

The tarantula dropped upon his face.

When young Egdon made it through for help and returned with the rest of us, his father was dead—the face was unrecognizable.

IT WAS almost a year after this unfortunate incident before I saw Egdon again. He had been sent off to the States by the company doctor almost immediately for a change of scene, and to be stimulated by cold weather. Moreover, we had written a letter to the home office suggesting that he be put in charge of one of the mines in the States, as the Philippines would be a distressing place for him, and his constitution was not such as could prosper in the terrible ordeal of a tropical climate. We thought the matter was settled.

But Egdon came back. He walked calmly into the Manila office one day and said that he had come to stay. He was somewhat changed, as we could well have expected. His long face was paler and more serious. Instead of having the exuberant health and poise we had hoped for him, he appeared nervous, harassed. Still he plunged into his work, ever falling back upon that reserve force of will that was so evident in him. He lived on his nerves, as it were.

We could not dissuade him from his decision to go back to the Benguet mountains to the scene of horror. Though he never mentioned his father's death, we decided around the office that he was obsessed with a morbid desire to get the incident out of his mind by seeing the place again, for we could not understand how any one would voluntarily want to live in those hills.

Egdon, however, postponed his departure. He had some business to wind up in Manila first, he said. When that was done, he still postponed. He would go next week. Then it became next month. The end of two months found him still in Manila.

As the months passed, he settled into a morose silence. Nervous, starting when the door was opened, he became the object of our awed and friendly sympathy. Still it was not natural for a man so to go against the course of nature as to mourn endlessly, and it finally was time, we thought, for him to shake himself free and be one of us again.

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Then too, so far as the company's business was concerned, he was not himself. He began to make mistakes. And for the first time in our memory he procrastinated in his duties. To hand a matter over to Egdon was like burying it.

When I finally had to call his attention to a delay which had cost the company some thousands of pesos, he turned to me a face so filled with torture that I was startled.

"You are not well, man," I said, "you'd better go home to the States."

Egdon stared at me as if not comprehending, a wild harassed light going and coming in his eyes.

"I can't," he said, "I'll pay for my error."

"Nonsense," I began—but he would hear no more about it.

Affairs could not go on in this way, and soon they became worse. Egdon was needed for a surveying trip to the lower end of Luzon.

He received the news in a startled manner and said that he would go. As the time drew nearer, he notified me that he could not get away for some time yet. Would I not get some one else?

I received this bit of information about lunch time and, as we occasionally had lunch together, I set out at once for his office.

The light was so bright that I shudder to think of it even now. I dodged along in the shadow of the buildings in Intramuros as you might dodge from a pouring rain and plunged into the stone corridor leading to his office. As I paused to wipe the sweat from the band of my helmet, I was conscious of a vague uneasiness. Perhaps it was no more than the shiver of nerves relaxing from the strain of the sun; at any rate always when I walked through the dismal passageway, I was wishing myself elsewhere.

Egdon was sitting listlessly in his swivel chair, his arms limp upon the chair-arms, his legs extended, his head slightly bowed, and his eyes moving uneasily about the room. Always I found him thus, as if overcome by the morning's work. His eyes, when not seeming to question my opinion of him, wavered pitiably here and there.

I remember, that after a *muchacho* had brought our lunch and we had eaten, I lay there almost at full length in the siesta chair, watching the lizards on the ceiling and the blue haze from my cigaret. I had about decided then that it was too delicate a theme for me to broach. His trouble, whatever it was, was too personal. I remember that in the instant that he ceased talking about another matter and went to the desk for a blue-print, I dozed off into a hazy unconsciousness, soothed by the smoke, the drowsy air, and the comfortable food that I had eaten.

Suddenly Egdon cried out.

It was a horrible cry, half-groan, half-gasp, modulated with a sickening throaty sound. For an instant I thought that I was strangling and had made the sound in my sleep, and I struggled up, clutching my throat.

Egdon at the desk had fallen back against his chair rigid with horror. His mouth and eyes were widely opened, his eyebrows raised and across his high forehead shot deep transverse wrinkles. One arm was extended toward the desk, the fingers straightened and separated. He was still making that peculiar gurgling, strangling noise. The terror was communicated to me and a cold chill ran up my spine, but I was at his side in an instant.

He was stiff, cold—he did not see me. He was staring at the desk. My first thought was epilepsy, but as his gurgling became less, I distinguished the words—

"Ook, Look!"

Following his outstretched hand, I at first saw nothing. Then a large spider, a harmless enough variety, scurried across the desk, dropped over the edge and disappeared.

Egdon collapsed into the chair. Then he placed his head on his arms and cried, "My God, my God!" rocking his head to and fro.

Finally he got up and paced the floor. His hand were clenching and unclenching in such agony that I feared a return of his spasm.

"Now you know," he said harshly, "now you know. That's what I am—a coward. I've sat in that chair for a year, never going out with the men, because—because I was afraid. And I've found 'em everywhere. They've come after me. They get in my shoes, in my hat—you saw it—you saw it! Now tell the men, tell everybody what a coward I am—tell——"

"Egdon!" I cried, jumping up to grasp his hand. "I wouldn't do that!"

He ignored me. I truly believe that he

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did not see me, that he did not even know that I was in the room. He paced up and down blindly, his eyes fixed, grinding out scarcely intelligible words—

"A coward, a big hulk of a coward—afraid—God!"

In the space of the next half-hour I was destined to witness the most heart-rending struggle that has ever fallen to my lot to see. He fought it out with himself. He cursed himself—he cursed God.

Finally it was over, and I was as limp as any rag. Egdon was sitting with arms folded on the desk.

"Then why did you ever come back to this God-for-saken region?" I asked.

"You don't understand?" he cried fiercely. "You don't realize that I *had* to come back?" Then he continued desperately:

"I am going out with that survey tomorrow. Do you understand that? I am going out with that survey where there are tarantulas on every banana and hemp scrub that grows. And I want you along, Doran, I want you there to see. By ——, I shall win out!"

He made a motion with his hands and fell to staring at his desk.

He said with great effort—

"I shall win out!"

THE little steamer *Romblon* went smoothly enough to its port of Albay, beneath the black, scarred cone of the Mayon volcano. Egdon had little to say. Sitting on the deck he watched the reflection of the palmy islands in the mirroring sea. I was with him constantly, thinking it best to talk little and to leave him to his victory. There were the usual tropical pests to make life sufficiently unendurable. Cockroaches as large as lizards scampered in all parts of the ship.

To none of these Egdon gave the slightest heed, and by the time we were anchored, Kwong Wop, the cook, had succeeded in poisoning so many of them that they gave us little trouble, except, indeed, by dying over the decks and exploding with a sickening *plop*, when we trod on them at night.

It was our custom to work in the early mornings and the late afternoons, running topography lines in from the coast for a new location. It was uninteresting routine surveying.

But I was living Egdon's life. I lived his struggle. At first it was wracking to see him with assumed calm step through the jungle, avoiding the broad leaves and the wet tangles of swinging vines, but he finally walked through the worst of them reckless enough.

We could hear the shouts of the other members of the party farther up the coast; but sometimes when we had been forced inward by the flat slopes to a depth of a half-mile we were entirely alone, except for the dripping of water from giant fronds, and lurid orchids here and there—the rest was monotonous jungle, banana palms, hemp, tangled grasses—a *cogon* variety rising far above our heads.

If Egdon suffered, his face showed little evidence of it. True, if we came upon that peculiarly vicious thing we knew merely by the name of "The Tarantula," that viscous, green death-head, with a span of legs as large as your hand, Egdon would leap upon it with his boots. When he turned, his face was white and his lips a straight line. He was living too intensely, taking too little rest, considering too seriously a danger which was slight, to say the least, if one was forewarned. But in the main I had no doubt that he would overcome his morbid imagination.

Thus it went for ten days.

Then late one afternoon after supper, he went ashore, leaving the rest of us grouped around the table, limp from the heat, smoking cigarets, turning the electric fans into more advantageous positions.

Through the door I could see the sky over Mayon. The clouds rested on its very summit, and a light smoke, issuing from the crater, poured out among them. It was a red evening, red and purple and black. The very sea seemed rotten with vegetation, and from its thick water the sky was reflected like blood in a bruised wound. I was trying to get amusement out of a dull game. I wished that I had gone with Egdon. Later I wished it all the more, but what follows I have had to collect from an American on shore, and from Kwong Wop who was on deck and saw Egdon return, and finally I have pieced out the motives.

Egdon went ashore. First he talked with the hotel keeper about the volcano and the survey. He was cheerful enough. Then he set out for the jungle. The land, bereft of the sun by the mountain, had fallen into

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darkness quickly. He was soon beyond the town. Then he turned into the jungle. How far he penetrated no one knows; why he went there, I can imagine. He went there to be alone. To be alone at night with the spiders that he feared. And it is very horrible in the jungle at night, alone, with a ghost in your soul.

Then he returned. He was not feeling well when accosted by the hotel keeper, and said that he would see the doctor and turn in. After this, there is no doubt of the story—except perhaps of my interpretation—for Kwong Wop, perched on the railing, saw his every move.

He returned to the ship.

Just as he placed his foot on the plank, he saw in the light cast by two lanterns on deck an enormous tarantula. It was moving toward him. The paralysis of months and months of fear siezed him. Still it came toward him.

Then Edgon did a peculiar thing. He raised his hands over his head and began to tighten his muscles. He tightened them more. Then his breath came out in a gasp and he tried to scream, but his throat was parched with dust or fear. No sound came out. The thing was still coming toward him down the gangplank, slowly, but it was coming. There was no mistaking that. Like a mere black shadow it stole toward him.

Egdon was trembling. But it was not entirely fear now. There was a new something in his attitude. His face was as white as ever, but it was hard and his eyes had steadied down. His hands were clenched with the effort of will. His slender body was tense. He was coming out from the paralysis. His eyes were still fixed on that shadow which now had stopped.

Then Egdon began to move. Not away from but toward it. He slowly, almost imperceptibly, moved forward his foot. Cat-like he placed it on the plank. Then again—slowly. He was within two feet of it. Still it had not moved. Egdon began to crouch. It was a long process. Had he grown smaller with the years, his movement could scarcely have been slower. The tigerish intensity pervaded his movements. He crouched like a beast ready to spring. His fingers were hooked like claws. Down toward the hideous thing below him.

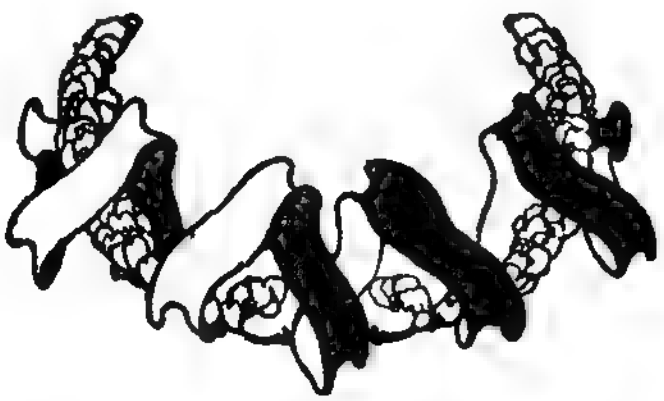
He could see its eyes again, its hideous, puffed skin, its blotches. It, too, was crouching to spring. Egdon's eyes were charmed to the spot, but he was the charmer—he, the aggressor. Slowly he crouched. Then he sprang.

His hand closed on the great fear. He felt the swollen thing crush in his grasp, felt its spiny legs crumple and fold—then the teeth enter his palm. He shrieked in pain. The scream reverberated as in a gallery of stone. Feeling the swift poison cut in—he screamed again in pain. He lived again in agony; he grew wild with a superhuman fury against the pain, against the fear.

Swearing blindly, he stumbled up the plank, the thing crushed in his hand. A wild light of triumph shone in his eyes. At the head of the slant he tried to shout, but his throat was parched again. He was burning inside. With his empty hand he clutched at his throat—then he pitched forward on the deck.

We heard his scream in the cabin. We heard his fall upon the deck. In ten seconds we were with him. We carried him to his bunk and stretched him out. He was dead. Mutely and stiffly we looked at one another.

As the doctor turned to us after a time of feeling his pulse, a mass of spiny pulp dropped from Egdon's hand upon his breast. Straightened out, it proved to be the crushed skeleton of an enormous cockroach.



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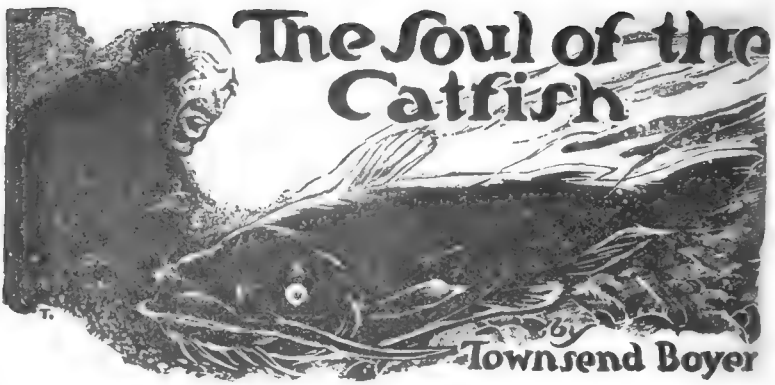

SASSOMAN PETREE had a monopoly of the boat business on Lake Shacklefoot. Nobody minded this, however, for most of the fishermen who went there were, like myself, old-timers. That meant that we could get as much fun out of this old negro's dugouts and clumsy board boats as out of the niftiest craft ever advertised in the pages of a sporting magazine, for we knew the Delta in its old days when a hand-hewn cypress dugout was about the only means of getting about on the network of bayous and lakes.

One thing we did mind, though: when we felt disinclined to row ourselves, we never could prevail on Sassoman to do it for us, but had to take a boy from town. No matter how liberal the fee, or how much time he had—and he seemed to have the whole twenty-four hours for nothing but his boat-renting business—he would shake his head. Then he would vex us by loafing about the landing, or in the vicinity of a huge cypress-tree a little farther up the lake, for as long as any one was on the lake.

Whether it was that absurd pride in being a boss—even of such an insignificant business as his—or whether it was just plain laziness, I could not decide, but somehow it did not seem to be either. In the simpering, childish make-up of the illiterate Sassoman one would hardly expect pride to have a part, and his alert, restless movement, as he walked about on the bank did not indicate bodily laziness. In fact, this wizened old negro, who they said was not half as old in years as in body, was an enigma to all of us, so we finally learned to quit expecting him to row a boat, or do anything else save follow his own whims.

Our first day on this trip had been a good one; everybody had caught about as many bream and bass with a good sprinkling of white perch and an occasional trout as he could easily lift with one hand from his boat. Jim, our negro cook, had cooked a mess of these in a great pot of swimming fat, as a cook fries doughnuts, and every man had eaten to repletion, being governed not by taste, for that could never be satisfied, but by the grip of his belt. With lighted pipes we had gathered about the fire, not only for its warmth, for a Delta night in Spring sometimes can be very chilly, but also because the wood smoke kept the mosquitoes away.

When Jim finished with his cooking, he also sought the safety zone about the fire, leaning back against the fire-log and stretching his shapely legs on the ground. With that the camp settled into that mood, which is dearer to the souls of men than the love of woman—a camp-fire mood. If men of all races can ever forget their prejudices, hates and selfishnesses it is around a camp-fire. The fire, with its little zone of light against the vast blackness of the wilderness, seems to reveal to the men huddled about it the hearts of each, the utter insignificance of the individual in the big Scheme of things and how much men need each other.

"The Soul of the Catfish," copyright, 1923, by Townsend Boyer.

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A long while we had smoked and talked, every man adding his quota of yarns, his bits of experience and his philosophy of life. Even Jim, coming under the spell of the time and place, ventured off on what is usually tabu topic and told us some hoodoo tales.

For the first time we learned that old Chuc-a-luc, a negro who did odd jobs about town, and who was known among the whites as a shrewd scoundrel, was a "hoodoo doctor"—one who is versed in the dark lore of hoodooism. We gravely listened as Jim told us that "they" said Chuc-a-luc "could do things," for we could see in this young, fairly well-educated negro the wavering attitude of one who knows better, but who can't quite shake off the effect of the ages of the darkness and superstition behind him.

Sticks breaking outside the rim of light interrupted Jim. He peered into what was a wall of darkness for the rest of us and called a friendly, "Hey!" Turning to us with what was at once an explanation and a request, he said—

"Sassoman."

Jim's swift intuition told him that a welcome awaited the old boatman around the white men's camp-fire, so without waiting for a verbal permission he bade Sassoman join us. Jim's manner toward country negroes was the usual snobbery of the town negro, but I noticed that with Sassoman he was gentle as with a child. But this was because the negroes regarded Sassoman as "queer" and with them it is bad luck to mistreat a queer person or one who is physically deformed in any way.

Sassoman, darting his beady black eyes from face to face as if afraid his welcome was not unanimous, diffidently squatted near Jim, but ere long he too, settled against the log and gave quiet but eager attention to the talk that went on around him. I noticed that with Sassoman's advent Jim said no more about hoodoo practises.

Although I had seen Sassoman many times, I had never closely studied his features; as he sat there in the flickering light of the campfire, his small deeply set eyes, tiny ears and heavy protruding jaws, now in bright light, now in shadow, I was struck with the similarity to an ape. More, there was the same sad wistful expression one sees in the more intelligent of the ape family. As I studied Sassoman's face it seemed to me as if all the burdens of the world were on his shoulders, and I was touched by it. Was the camp-fire melting me into a sentimental, visionary mood, or was it simply breaking down his habitual mask and letting the real Sassoman show?

Pshaw! I was getting impatient with myself. What could Sassoman have of hidden trouble, he whose only interest in life was collecting the dollar per day for his boats? In all probability he was as contented as a tadpole in a sunny ditch.

Nevertheless, my attention kept wandering to him and the conviction grew that the veiled hint of tragedy in his face was genuine. Even when he gave his short barks of laughs they were as devoid of deep, real amusement as a stage laugh.

When Fletcher opened up with a ghost tale, Jim listened with an assumption of amusement, but not Sassoman. He hitched closer to the fire and usurped Jim's privilege of adding fresh wood, stirring and punching the coals into a bright blaze. Now and then he would dart furtive glances over his shoulder to the blackness that hung over the lake behind him.

Fletcher and Wilson yawned sleepily and crept under their mosquito nets to bed, and still Sassoman lingered, trying to make small talk with Jim and to entertain him with such childish pranks as throwing his fingers out of joint and rolling his eyes upward until the pupils were out of sight.

Finally when I got up to go to bed, he rose from his place near the fire and said he must go, but instead of leaving at once he shoved his hands in his pockets and looked over toward the lake, then took his hands out of his pockets and, twisting them together, looked at Jim. Again Jim's quick intuition read things, and he offered to accompany Sassoman across the lake, an offer that was eagerly accepted.

NEXT morning on my way out to a location, some whim prompted me to break fishermen etiquette. When doing my own rowing, as I was that day, since Jim had gone with Fletcher and Wilson in a large boat, I prefer a dugout, as these light slender craft can be put through places impossible with a boat.

I had squirmed through the brush and logs in the edge of the water casting for bream, until I reached the knees about the big cypress-tree. Upon seeing Sassoman's trotline I thrust out the end of my pole and

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lifted one of the lines which are supposed to carry hooks. There was only an old piece of rusty iron on the string.

"A turtle has got that one," I said to myself, and lifted another.

It was also without a hook. Then I tried them all and found the lines carrying only crude weights, which the veriest tyro in fishing would know better than to use—if he expected to catch anything.

What was the idea, I wondered as I rowed away. Was it a stall to stake a claim on a favored spot? Still, there could be no sense in that, as favored places are likely to result in poor fishing and sometimes the most unlikely spot gives good luck.

As I came down the lake that afternoon I saw that Sassoman had his line on the bank, doing something to it. It occurred to me to cast about the tree just to see what he would do, now that he had his line out and I could make that an excuse for the intrusion. I headed the dugout in that direction.

But I had reckoned without Sassoman. I had ceased using the oar and was letting the dugout glide quietly up with its own momentum in order not to disturb the bream which are always ensconsed under a sheltering root or log.

Sassoman dropped his line and walked out on the trunk of a low-lying tree, just at the top of the water. Instantly there was a mighty swish in the water among the cypress knees—enough to scare away the very leeches on the submerged roots. For the first time I noted that the tree-top seemed particularly well-suited for just such accidents. A little trick to discourage meddling fishermen, for no one would deem it worth while to waste time in the locality after such a disturbance. But I was now more determined than ever.

"Confound you, Sassoman!" I exclaimed in feigned vexation. "I would have been certain to have caught a big bream among those cypress knees."

"Mistah Bill, wuz you aimin' ter fish dar?" he asked innocently. "I thought you wanted to land here, an' bein's de cypress knees is so bad, I wuz aimin' ter pull you in."

Then he added mitigatingly—

"But den 'tain't no use nohow. I nevah seed a brim caught dar in my life."

"Believe I'll try, anyhow—just for luck," I said, reaching down for my bait-box.

As I baited the hook he just stood there on the inclined tree over the water, holding to a branch to steady himself and regarded me in silence. When I sat up to cast the hook, I glanced at him and on his face I saw such an expression as one might see on the face of a father watching a surgeon preparing to operate on his child. It was too much. I laughed and dropped the hook, then rowed off to the camp side of the lake, where Jim was already waiting for my catch for supper.

Instead of joining Fletcher and Wilson in the camp to wash and rest a bit before supper, I tied the dugout and walked up the bank until opposite Sassoman's tree. Shacklefoot Lake, in common with many Delta lakes, is very long—sometimes several miles—very narrow and very deep with abrupt banks, the whole conformation suggesting an earthquake fissure. The bank where I stood was several feet higher than on the opposite side, which was only about a hundred yards distant at this point, so I could look right down upon Sassoman and his operations.

He was tying pieces of meat and plucked birds on the weighted strings; a foolish waste of meat, I thought, for of course he could expect to catch nothing and he did not seem any too well-fed himself. Nor could he be baiting for a later catch, for the only thing one baited for was that big sucker, the buffalo; and a soft bait of cotton and mush was used, not a meat bait.

Having finished with the baiting, he dropped the line into his boat beached near by, then walked up to the cypress-tree, where he busied himself for a moment. What he was doing I could not tell for he was on the opposite side of the tree. After that he got into the boat and pushed out.

Then occurred an astonishing thing. I could see it because the lake was between me and the evening sun which lighted up the water, though dimly, as through thick glass.

Sassoman picked up two stones from the bottom of his boat, leaned over the side and struck them together near the surface of the water with the regularity of a clock ticking. Slowly a shape as large as a man rose in the water and moved toward the boat, which was floating clear of the knees some distance from the cypress-tree.

Sassoman picked up a plucked bird and held it under the water. The shape moved

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nearer, paused, then backed away and circled uncertainly. Sassoman again clicked the stones together, meanwhile holding the bird in the water. Slowly, little by little, the shape moved nearer, until I could no longer see it, for it was lost in the shadow of the boat. There followed a tremendous disturbance in the water. Sassoman gave his short, eery bark of a laugh, then picked up his paddle and went up to a bowed root of the tree. To this he tied one end of his trotline and the other to a projecting snag some distance away, then returned to the landing.

"Good heavens, can the fool be monkeying that way with an alligator?" I asked myself.

But it could not have been an alligator, for it never put its nose above the surface.

As I walked back to the camp I decided to say nothing about what I had seen. I wanted to follow the hunch I had the previous night, that there was something out of the ordinary about Sassoman. Besides, the others might butt in on the rites at the cypress-tree and so spoil things, for I did not believe a look at those proceedings alone would solve the secret.

That night Sassoman again visited our camp, coming before Jim had finished cleaning up his cooking-things. There was such an ingratiating manner about him, such an obvious effort to make himself agreeable, that I knew now he came because he was hungry for the company of his kind. They said Sassoman lived alone fifteen years in the cabin across the lake, seeing only the occasional fishing parties, or the wayfarer who had the occasion—or perhaps need—to travel in this outlying district.

When we were all seated about the fire I gave him some tobacco and asked him if the geese were still going north, in order to get him strung out on the one topic on which he was voluble, the creatures of the wild.

"Dey's all dun lef' here weeks ago. An' I never is seed so few geese goin' no'th. Bimeby us ain't gwine ter have no geese 'tall."

Genuine regret was in his tones at this reference to the passing of the wild life, to which, I doubted not, he felt a closer friendship than with his human brothers. He then plunged into an account of the old days before the advent of the motor-boat and the automobile, which in a few years has reduced the flocks of geese and ducks from countless thousands to a few remnants.

"Why, de ducks wuz thicker'n blackbirds on dis lake when I fu'st come, an' I couldn't sleep fer de cranes an' shikepokes whoopin' lak hounds across de sky."

This started a general reminiscence of the old days when the Delta, if not exactly a bad place, was certainly not a perfectly moral section, for thither had gathered the adventurous and the lawless of many States.

"I would give anything to know what become of Tobe Lynchard," Fletcher said out of his fire-gazing revery. "He disappeared about fifteen years ago as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed him. While nobody cared or bothered much about it, for he was the meanest cuss that ever stirred up trouble and scared the life out of niggers, still I have always wondered what became of him."

"I could not say," replied Wilson, who was an ex-lumber man and our oldest old-timer, "but I can imagine what might have happened to a man whose occupation was compelling saw-mill niggers to shoot craps with him so that he could skin them. Why, that son-of-a-gun knew when every pay-day in the Delta came and never failed to make a clean sweep. And we could not do a blasted thing about it, for when a man made Tobe mad he retaliated by running his nigger help off. His big boast was that he could not remember how many he had killed."

I happened to look at Sassoman; rather, something impelled me to look at him. His face was the color of gray pasteboard, and his beady black eyes fixed upon Wilson had the cold steady stare of a snake. In the flickering firelight I could not tell whether the expression meant menace for Wilson or deadly fright. In any case I knew by the emotion barely showing in his eyes, that Sassoman was one of those who are as dangerous when badly frightened as when enraged.

I mentally tabulated all the things I was seeing of him tonight, along with what I had seen on the lake and the night before, when he first visited us.

NEXT morning, before starting off for the day's fishing, Fletcher decided his boat needed a patch and sent Sassoman into his cabin for the necessary things. I took advantage of Sassoman's absence to stroll toward the cypress-tree,

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offering Fletcher and Wilson the explanation that I wanted to search for a float I pretended to have lost the evening before while passing that way.

When I reached the tree I saw about as high as my head two slashes in the bark, made at right angles with each other and forming a three-cornered flap, which I raised. The flap concealed a hole gouged out of the tree, in which reposed the five dollars Sassoman had collected the day before from us, together with a pair of crude clay images made together somewhat after the fashion of the twins of the zodiac. On the breast of one was a rough drawing of a catfish, and on the other was that of a man.

"Some hoodoo nonsense," I concluded, dropping the flap back into place and pressing it down smoothly so that it would not show that it had been disturbed.

Scattered about over the ground were feathers of birds—jays, cardinals, blackbirds and others of the common species. Delicacies for his highness, the Dark Shape, no doubt.

Leaning over the bank and supporting myself with a hand on the tree, I looked down into the water still shadowy in the early morning light; the roots of the cypress-tree twisted and looped about like huge serpents; some of the knees with the bark rubbed off their caps—evidently by Sassoman's frequent boat-trips in the vicinity—shone with a weird yellowish light under the dirty gray-green water.

Stopping, I picked up a crayfish chimney from the ground at my feet and pitched it some distance from the bank into the water. *Ploomp*. It hit the surface and disappeared with the muffled gurgle of very deep water.

At this disturbance in the water there arose nearer me bubbles; then slowly there welled up, as large as a bed-quilt, a cloud of disturbed mud. I watched while it slowly dissipated and the water again became its ghastly gray-green color. Usually I think I am not afraid of water, but, as is the case with all men, there comes times when I realize I am only fooling myself. The spirit of cruel inexorableness, of everlastingness, of absolute indifference to such things as life and death and time and eternity, gets a fellow.

We know that water can ripple just as brightly when hiding under its breast a rotting corpse, as when kissing the feet of the flowers on its banks. And, knowing, every man-jack of us at times fears and hates water. As I leaned over the water watching the knees and roots, furred and slimy with algae, becoming visible again after that disturbance down in the depths, a horrid creepy feeling came upon me. I drew back and left.

I strolled back and reported failure to find the missing float and announced my intention of fishing for white perch that day. That was to enable me to stay in the middle of the lake, where I could best keep an eye on Sassoman and the tree.

About ten o'clock I heard a wagon rattling along the lakeside road and looked up to see old Chuc-a-luc in his one-horse wagon. There were some young trees sticking out of the back of the wagon, miserable victims of his tree-planting activities in town, I supposed. But then, in season and out his wagon contained an uprooted tree or shrub, and I had sometimes thought it was to give an appearance of business activity.

As I was wondering why he came so far afield for his transplanting stock, when there were plenty of woods nearer town, he stopped his wagon. Looking about in every direction and seeing me apparently very intent on my fishing business, he probably concluded the coast was clear, for he walked directly to the cypress-tree. I saw him put something into his pocket, then go back to his wagon and drive on past Sassoman's house.

So there were two in the secret of the cypress-tree—and Chuc-a-luc could "do things."

I was having no luck, so decided to quit fishing. Besides, we were breaking up in the morning, and I wanted to know about that cypress-tree.

Sassoman was seated on a log at the landing and doing something to his rags of clothes. I rowed up and anchored my boat in the shade beneath him by sticking the paddle into the mud by the boat.

"Sassoman, did you ever know that fellow Tobe Lynchard, they were talking about last night?"

"Na—naw, sir," he blurted, and looked up, startled. His face began taking on the gray-pasteboard look. "Never seed 'im. Don't know a thing about him."

"The old Delta days were awful, weren't they—people scattered so far apart that just anything could happen to a fellow and nobody ever knew?"

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"Maybe dey wuz—don't know nuthin' bout 'em."

"Did old Chuc-a-luc know Tobe Lynchard?" I then said.

"Don't know, suh. No, he didn't know 'im—didn't know nuthin bout 'im."

To be speaking for another, Sassoman was rather positive.

"Wouldn't it be easy to drown a man in a lake like this? Nobody would ever find it out," I then shot.

Sassoman never answered. He just sat there in the same quiet way with his eyes staring at me in the same hard manner I had seen him looking at Wilson.

I had found out what I wanted to know, so I turned to row across the lake for lunch.

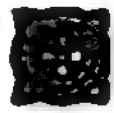
"By the way, Sassoman," I called over my shoulder, "I saw Chuc-a-luc pass this morning. Keep on the watch and when he comes back tell him I want him to haul a load into town for me tomorrow. I'll pay him more than he will make out of those half-dead trees. Be certain that you do it, for if you fail I will have to make an extra trip down here to get our camp things back to town."

That afternoon I rigged up several large hooks with wire shanks that we had been trying to catch gars with, and suspended them from a rope. After shooting several blackbirds I hung around, killing time until after Sassoman had visited the cypress-tree for the evening and had gone to his cabin to cook his supper.

Upon seeing the smoke emerging from his chimney I took the newly improvised tackle and the birds, which I had skinned, and rowed across the lake to the cypress-tree. Quickly lifting each of his lines, I snatched off the bait and dropped them into my boat. Then I suspended my rope with the baited hooks from the same supports, but out of sight under the water in case Sassoman should pass near.

"If luck is with me," I said to myself as I rowed away, "I will learn the secret of the cypress-tree and perhaps ease some of the burden off the shoulders of this poor old Hercules."

When daylight came I was already dressed and waiting, so eager was I to learn what success I had had with my hooks. I got in my dugout and rowed straight to them, indifferent now to who might see.



MY HEART leaped when I saw by the turmoil about the cypress-tree roots that I had been successful. I grasped one end of the rope and endeavored to lift it in order to see the Dark Shape, but I might as well have tried to lift a bale of cotton. I held on, however, and put my strength steadily against the thing on the line. After a few minutes the line suddenly went slack, and there was a flash of huge white belly as the thing whirled over in the water and almost upset my dugout.

I realized that to wrestle with it in my craft would be foolhardy, as the dugout would dip sidewise almost as easily as a log turns in water, so I lowered the rope and drew off to call the others from the camp to help.

Sassoman came running up to the edge of the water, his face a stiff mask of dismay. After wringing his hands and gibbering inarticulately for a moment he found voice.

"Mr. Bill, don't ketch 'im. Please don't ketch 'im. Chuc-a-luc said as long as I paid de twins and kept de fish happy, Tobe Lynchard's sperrit wouldn't hant me." Suddenly he went into a very frenzy of anxiety. "Oh, Gawd, I sho is tried to do it! Many's de mile I'se tramped to bird-traps, many's de time I'se gone hongry myself, but I'se allus had something fer de line in de evenin'. Mos' every dollar I made went to Chuc-a-luc, but I could sleep widout seein' Tobe's head follerin' me roun' at night. But now if you ketch 'im it'll all 'mount to nuthin' an' Tobe'll go to comin' ag'in at nights——"

"Sassoman, shut up your mouthing, and tell me what happened to Tobe Lynchard," I ordered as severely as I could speak, knowing that harshness would bring him to his senses quicker than sympathy.

"Mr. Bill, I didn't aim ter kill 'im! I'm tellin' you de Gawd's troof, I didn't! I saw him wait in de woods an' kill anudder nigger, an' he knew I saw 'im. He made lak he wanted me to row 'im across de lake, an' I was scared not to do it. We got rat in de middle out dar—" he pointed to the lake behind me—"den he ris up in de boat an' pinted his gun at me. 'Now, you —— nigger, I'll see dat you tell no tales after being so smart to spy on me. I'se gwine ter bury you deeper'n —— rat here in dis lake.' I must a flinched and made de boat jump, fer he fell out backards.

"Den ev'y time he'd come up I'd hit him

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on de head wid de paddle 'till he quit comin' up. I watched a long time to see if he was gwine ter come up agin; den I saw a catfish wid his tail nicked lak a turtle or sumpin had had a hold of it swimmin' roun' and roun' in de spot where Tobe went under de las time."

A cold shiver ran over me as my eyes went to the bowed cypress-root, which was bending under the strain on the rope tied about it. The uncanniness of the affair was getting me.

"And Chuc-a-luc's part?" I asked turning again to Sassoman.

"I kept worryin' an' and worryin' and couldn't sleep cause Tobe's head kept comin' up in front of me everywhere I'd go. I'd heard 'em say dat Chuc-a-luc wuz a hoodoo doctor an' could do things, so I went to 'im. He told me if I'd pay de twin toby—" a toby is a gimcrack of some sort by which the hoodoo fakirs perform their magic, a clay image, a bit of hair in a red flannel bag and such—"a dollar a week he thought he could make Tobe Lynchard's sperrit stay happy in de catfish, where it went when he drowned.

"Us fished round several days till we found de fish wid de nicked tail—you know how us black folks kin ketch fish wid our hands by feelin' roun' under logs an' roots. Dat's how we caught him rat dar under dat crypress root. First I kept 'im in a live box under de water but he got so he stay anyhow, I feed 'im so regular."

Phew! I whistled in astonishment. Old Chuc-a-luc, right under our noses, was mixing a deep knowledge of the psychology of a criminal with the animism of the African jungle! For a moment I looked at the victim, half-crazed with the memory of a crime which Chuc-a-luc knew so well how to keep alive and to profit by. Pity and anger filled me.

"Sassoman, you are a plain fool. Can't you see Chuc-a-luc is merely bleeding you? He has no more power to do things than a stump."

"Yes he kin do things," Sassoman assured me stoutly. "Tobe's sperrit ain't nevah bothered me since I begun feedin' de fish an' payin de twins—jest as he said it wouldn't."

"Tobe's spirit isn't bothering you now simply because you believe it won't. And before Chuc-a-luc got a hold of you, you believed it would."

But I saw that he was unconvinced. How was I to combat the evil influence of the old hoodoo trickster and set this poor negro free? Suddenly I had an idea.

"Where is Chuc-a-luc—did he come back yesterday?"

"He is in de house. He stayed wid me las night."

"Go bring him here, but don't say a word about what we have said," I ordered.

Chuc-a-luc, sly and evil-eyed, but unsuspicious, approached in that frank, friendly, white-man-I'm-your-nigger attitude, by which a negro can almost always get under the skin of a white man. But for once it failed to work. I had paddled up to the bank and when they reached me I said without any preliminary:

"Chuc-a-luc, turn and look Sassoman in the face and tell him that you have lied to him all these years about Tobe Lynchard and the catfish, just to get his money."

Sassoman became round-eyed with suspense and Chuc-a-luc's face took on a sickly grin, but I never batted an eye. In the silence Chuc-a-luc seemed to gather his wind again for he began looking from me to Sassoman. Evidently he sensed the fact that his hoodoo bubble was ready for pricking, for he played what he, no doubt, thought was his trump card:

"What de law gwine ter do bout Sassoman killin' Tobe Lynchard?"

It was a threat over his fast-awakening client rather than a question.

"Not a blamed thing! It was a justifiable killing and happened so long ago that there could hardly be a case against Sassoman, even if anybody wanted to prosecute him—which they don't. But it can—if I choose to inform it—get you for obtaining money through extortion and false pretenses. How would you like to work for several years on Mississippi's big plantation for your board and striped breeches?"

For a reply Chuc-a-luc turned to Sassoman.

"Tobe Lynchard's sperrit ain't gwine ter bother you no mo'. Fifteen year is as long as a man can hant anudder."

The wily scoundrel was fighting for his reputation to the end.

"Chuc-a-luc, that is not what I told you to tell Sassoman. He is going back to town with me for a yard-boy and he is not going with any of your nonsense in his head. You are going to confess to him that you are a

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lying scoundrel and to assure him that never again will you bother him nor mention the Tobe Lynchard affair, because if you do it is Parchman and the striped breeches for you."

Without further ado Chuc-a-luc complied with my demands to the letter. I then said:

"And whatever sort it may be, you, with your hands, are going to set free the soul in the catfish."

With that I paddled out to the bowed root and tied an extra rope to the one on which the fish was caught, then threw it to the negroes on the bank.

"When I untie the other end from the snag you all pull him out."

I then made a detour of the cypress-roots and knees and, approaching on the opposite side, freed the rope.

Slowly, inch by inch, they drew the fish nearer as he fought and floundered among the cypress roots, and at last his great bulk heaved up to the surface, where he thrashed the water furiously. Sassoman was about to drop his hold and run, but I yelled at him, and he stood by. Soon they had him on the bank, where he flopped and rolled, a great slaty-blue, slimy hulk, fully six feet long, with a head as large as a keg. A large gap was in the tail-fin as if a piece had been torn out.

I rowed back to the bank and threw my hatchet to Chuc-a-luc.

"Strike him in that little depression on the back of the head."

With a last look of defiance, he eyed me for a few moments, then surrendered. Once twice, thrice, the hatchet sank through the leathery skin into the skull. After writhing sidewise until the head and tail almost touched, the fish suddenly stopped and began the tell-tale quivering, which shows when a catfish is stabbed in the brain, the only way whereby they can be quickly killed.

As the life went out of the great, paunchy thing, fat on the toil of the poor foolish negro, the cold, glassy eyes seemed to emit a sinister light. The big jaws opened wide, then closed; the hundreds of teeth gritting together as if in a last spasm of hate. I shuddered in spite of myself, but when I lifted my eyes to Sassoman he was twisting his face into an unaccustomed laugh of happiness.

LETTERS FROM A TRAMP—MARSEILLES

by Frederick Campbell

SOME people say one thing about this place, and some say another; but what's wrong with it from my point of view is its nearness to Monte.

You remember Harris, the second—the guy that had figured out the cargo capacity of the Ark, and was working on the date of the Flood with the nautical almanac? Well, it seems he's a gamblomaniac when not reading the Bible, and he was figuring out *rouge et noir* or something when he ought to have been mooring the blunt end of the ship; and if I hadn't gone and got his lines unscrambled, the Old Man'd have opened lunch with a blood cocktail.

Well, we weren't more than tied up before he was over the side in his best shoregoing togs, and believe me, he wasn't alone in the great city. There were only two of us to dinner yesterday, and today only yours truly.

We're moored right on the Cannebière, and last night I was in a café, watching a bunch of Frenchmen rubbering at a sheik—burnoose and all complete—who could have murdered the whole lot of them, but drank his coffee and took no notice, when whom should I see right outside but Harris, talking to one of those gambling-house runners.

He kept saying, "No go aloneel" as if the guy was a chink—meaning that he didn't want to go alone on account of the chance of getting his throat cut. With his religious views, I don't believe he'd want to have his throat cut anywhere, unless perhaps it was in a church.

However, after a bit, up comes Seymour, the third engineer, and they went off together.

You remember my buying that $1.25 watch in Pensacola last September? Well, Harris had had three watches and chains stolen since April, and I knew his fourth couldn't last long.

Well, sure enough, he came home about eight bells today minus the timepiece and cable. I met him at the gangway, and the first thing he says to me was:

"I'm no good! *God's angry with me!*"

I instantly sold him the watch for $8....

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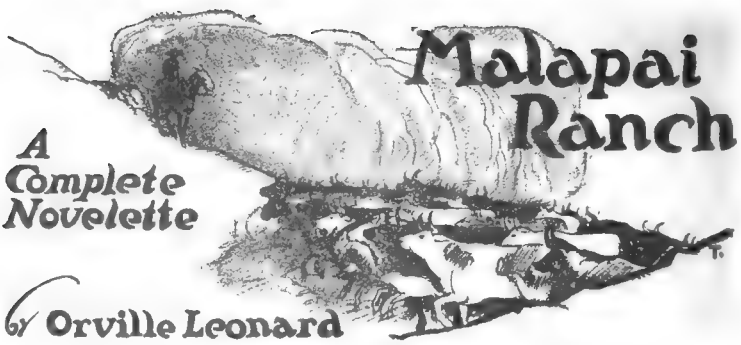

Malapai Ranch

A Complete Novelette

by Orville Leonard

HE DROPPED off the train at Navaho Crossing and stood on the warped wooden platform, whose planks were curling at both ends in the desert sun; and he looked first at the retreating train, then up the track the way he had come, and then at the country on both sides of the track. There wasn't much to see—a freight-house, a general store, a few shacks squatting around promiscuously in the sand, and beyond the general store, a big saloon with a false front.

The only man in sight was a loose-jointed individual in chaps and blue denim shirt, who leaned carelessly against one of the legs of a water-tank and smoked an indolent cigaret. This solitary desert man, taking his cigaret from his lips, whistled "The Lone Prairie" on a high, piercing key, while his sober, far-away-looking eyes were bent on a slowly drifting buzzard in a hot blue sky.

The traveler, a vigorous, alert-looking young fellow, with a lively eye, approached the listless one who had concluded his music and resumed his cigaret. "Is William Veeder in town?" he asked.

The cigaret consumer eyed him solemnly.

"Bill Veeder? Bill's ranch, stranger, is thirty miles from here, an' he don't honor us right often. No, I reckon he ain't."

The stranger's face looked blank for a moment.

"Well, is there anywhere I can put up here for the night?" he asked.

The leaning one eyed him lazily.

"There ain't no hotel, but mebbe Lon Fuller, the store-keeper, can sleep you fer a night. You aimin' for Veeder's?"

"Yes."

"Well, Lon's most usually in the Ice Box; business not bein' what you might call brisk most times."

"The Ice Box?" queried the stranger.

"Sure—the Desert Ice Box—that there false-fronted booze palace. They calls it that, partly on account o' the hot stuff they sling over the bar, an' partly because it's s'posed to be so cool in there. But it ain't, stranger. It's the hottest place in these parts, in more ways than one."

"Thanks," said Harry Eggleston with an amused smile, "I'll go hunt up the grocer in the Ice Box."

When the stranger pushed through the swing doors of Navaho Crossing's one large, rather decrepit saloon, all looked dark and mysterious to eyes focused to the brilliant desert sunlight, but gradually objects detached themselves from the gloom, and he could see two men playing cribbage at a round table against the side wall, and three men lined up against the bar. Two of them wore the dress of the puncher and were lean and sun-browned; the third, dressed in cheap store clothes, was short and rotund, with a rather pale face—and to him Eggleston spoke.

"Is this Mr. Fuller?" His voice was pleasant, and a trifle hesitant.

"Yes, that's me," said Lon Fuller.

The new arrival smiled in a conciliatory manner.

"A gentleman holding up a water-tank down by the railroad track told me to ask

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here for you. I'm looking for William Veeder, but the man at the track said he wasn't in town at present."

"He ain't," said Fuller.

"And there's no hotel where I could put up until he arrives, I'm told. Could you let me sleep somewhere round your place while I wait for him? Or maybe I could hire a horse and ride out to Veeder's ranch?"

"Ain't any livery here, son," said Fuller, "and you'd prob'ly get lost if you moseyed out there alone. Malapai Ranch ain't no easy place fer a stranger to locate—an' it's on the aidge o' the Malapai country, where a stranger ain't got any call to find himself alone."

"Well," laughed Eggleston ruefully, "there's no livery here, and no hotel, so if you'll put me up over night, I'll hoof it out there in the morning."

"Sure, I'll put you up, son—but your business must be pressin', to be in a hurry thataway. These here gents ride fer Veeder, and maybe one of 'em will ride an' tie with you. They're pullin' out tomorrow."

Eggleston looked at the two punchers with polite interest.

"That'll be fine, if these gentlemen will permit?"

Jim Gaines, the tall, morose one, drawled:

"Sure—I'll lead you out there. Stumpy, here, can go ahead an' tell the boss there's comp'ny comin'."

"Thank you," said Eggleston gratefully, "then I'll meet you tomorrow morning—at what time?"

"Make it five o'clock," said Gaines. "You wantêr get off this flat desert an' up inter the hills where the cañons give a little shade, afore the sun gets goin' good."

Eggleston whistled. "I'd better be getting between sheets now, then, if I'm to meet you at 5 A.M."

"Sheets!" grinned Fuller. "Just a blanket an' a tarp on the floor, son. That's all this burg affords. Come, an' I'll lead you to 'em."

It was only late afternoon, but Eggleston had spent a sleepless night on the train, so he only waited for Fuller to give him an early supper of ham and eggs before rolling himself in a blanket on the floor of the general store, beneath an empty counter; and was soon deep in sleep.

AT DAWN, he awoke, swallowed a hasty breakfast, and then Fuller told him—

"I've managed to dig up an old cayuse fer you to ride, stranger—better than walking—though he ain't any great shakes."

And he pointed through the window to where a bronco, drooping of head and sleepy-eyed, stood hitched to the rail. One sagging hip tapered down to a hitched-up leg, whose elevated hoof rested on the sand by its toe.

"He ain't pretty, but he's fuller o' the devil than he looks—an' he'll git you there," grinned the store-keeper at Eggleston's doubtful look.

Before he had gulped the last of his coffee, spurs and bridle chains jingled, as Gaines and "Stumpy" threw their horses back to a halt with a cruel jerk of the reins before the hitch-rack where Fuller's pony dozed in the early sun.

"Hey, Fuller," called Gaines through the open door. "Tell that feller to hurry. We aim to pull out *pronto*, 'fore the desert gets to sizzlin'."

"You heard 'em, stranger?" said Fuller.

"Sure, I heard—and I'm on my way," said Eggleston, rising and hurrying to the decrepit-looking pony.

Gaines eyed the stranger's mount disparagingly.

"He ain't much of a looker, but now you got a cayuse, Stumpy c'n stay with us; ridin' an' tyin' ain't much fun in them mountains."

In a moment, the three were jogging through the heavy sand; and after a half-mile, swales and ridges and dunes of sand hid from their sight the huddle of wooden boxes called Navaho Crossing. Gaines and Stumpy jogged on in morose silence, stealing occasional glances at the stranger, of which he seemed unconscious. Their critical eyes noted what he could not conceal; a certain ease and assurance in the saddle, despite his city dress and cosmopolitan air.

Noon came, and they munched dried beef and crackers as they rode. The afternoon waned, and the country grew steeper, darker, wilder.

"When are we due at Veeder's?" asked Eggleston carelessly as the horses topped a hogback, with a wild, desolate-looking jumble of peaks and hollows before them.

"It ain't so far now, but I reckon we won't make it tonight," growled Gaines.

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"It's gettin' late, an' from here on, most o' the trail is standin' on its head; 'tain't safe, even fer a mountain bronco, after dark."

Gaines looked straight on over the trail ahead, with a disgusted look on his face, but Eggleston caught the trace of a grin on Stumpy's more mobile features as he flashed a glance from the long puncher to his shorter, more genial companion.

Eggleston said no more: he knew that in some parts of the mountain country, on a steadily ascending trail, from two to three miles an hour was an average rate of speed for a burdened horse, but he also knew that broncos acquainted with the trails, stepped them fearlessly at night, even in dangerous country. For some reason, these men were playing for time.

Still they rode on, and now they were going steadily down hill, after climbing all the afternoon. The sun dropped behind the peaks above them, yet Gaines rode forward silently. Twilight came, then dusk, then a dark, velvety night, studded with low-hung stars.

"Better get off, stranger," grunted Gaines, dropping lightly to the trail and tramping ahead slowly, his bronco following like a dog, with Eggleston behind him and Stumpy bringing up the rear.

For an hour they went in silence—then Eggleston struck a match and looked at his watch.

"Nine o'clock—thought you boys expected to be at Veeder's before dark," he called out.

"We're headed fer one o' the outlyin' ranches this side o' Malapai," said Gaines. "Had ter change our plans 'bout goin' straight to the ranch, account o' its bein' so late. Be there tomorrow."

Then from the darkness below them came the lowing of many cattle, and their nickering horses were answered by shrill whinnies trembling up from the blackness ahead and below.

As they drew nearer, Gaines gave a peculiar yell. In a moment, a lantern flashed in the darkness and a deep voice called—

"That you, Gaines?"

"Yeh, me an' Stumpy. Got a stranger with us, bound for Veeder's. Had to come this way, but we'll be pullin' out before daylight."

There was a guarded reserve in Gaines' tone which seemed to tell his questioner to ask no more.

By the light of the lantern, hung now on a peg in an open corral shed, Eggleston tumbled from his drooping bronco and caught flickering glimpses of a face that would have been handsome but for the recklessness and dissipation etched deeply into the features.

The lantern-bearer waited until the three had offsaddled and turned their horses into the corral back of the shed, then led the way to a long one-story shack, with bunks built against the walls on two sides. Lewis, the lantern-bearer, lighted a lamp on the long pine table, looked keenly at Eggleston, then turned to Gaines and Stumpy Horton.

"Well, how come? You're late—shootin' the hooch in Navaho?"

"Unavoidably detained, Thad," grinned Gaines, "but I'll tell you about it after grub."

He looked at the other significantly and sat down, carelessly rolling a cigaret.

A cook came then, a slender, hatchet-faced fellow, with a pallid, furtive look, and supper was eaten in silence, for Eggleston was too tired to talk, and the three others were in the habit of leaving all talk until hunger was satisfied. After supper, Eggleston brought out his cigar case.

"Have a smoke, fellows?" he asked.

"No thanks, stranger. I like to roll my own," said Lewis.

"Same here," echoed Gaines and Stumpy.

They gossiped of doings in Navajo Crossing until Eggleston flung his half-burned cigar into the box wood-stove and yawned. "If you chaps don't mind, I'll turn in. If I don't I'll be asleep right here in a minute."

"Sure," and there was a relieved note in Lewis's voice, "we'll go out an' powwow."

The three tramped out, leaving the young fellow to undress quickly and tumble into a none too clean bunk. But in spite of his weariness, he could not sleep; for his muscles ached, his nerves fluttered, and he thought he could almost hear his bones creak when he turned in his bunk.

In that profound stillness, when overtaxed powers string all the senses taut, he could hear Lewis' deep voice through the chinks in the logs at the back of his bunk. It was a mere mumble of sound, but when Gaines replied, his resonant, clear-cut tones carried far, though low-spoken:

"The boss had word from Eggleston o' this feller's comin'. He's to learn ranch

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ways, an' Veeder aims to get this bunch o' cattle shipped down to Soda Flats tomorrer. You got to get 'em out, Thad, to make room for the other bunch that's comin' through the pass from Malapai tomorrow night. We goes 'round by the Eagle Trail over old Baldy, comin' into Malapai from the rear, so's we won't meet our punchers on the way here, with that bunch o' mixed brands."

Another indistinguishable rumble from Thad Lewis. Then Gaines's clear voice again.

"Can't help it if you are short-handed, Thad. That's Veeder's orders. This stranger's got sharp eyes, an' the brands on them cattle he don't read won't hurt him. I'm riskin' his gettin' suspicious, chasin' 'round this way, but he don't savvy any connection between this hollow an' Veeder."

Then the voices trailed off into a low murmur as the three strolled farther away. Eggleston lay wide-eyed in the darkness until he heard footsteps drawing near the bunk-house, when he rolled over face to the wall and lay still with closed eyes.

WHEN Eggleston awoke in the morning, a sense of impending adventure was with him, and he awaited developments with interest. At breakfast, Gaines looked up from his ham and eggs to say:

"Jest heard from Thad Lewis, here, that there's been a slide on the trail we was aimin' to take—trail clean blocked with rock an' timber, so it means an all-day ride around. Sorry, stranger, if you was in a hurry to git to Malapai Ranch."

"Oh, that's all right," returned Eggleston carelessly, "I'll see more of the country that way."

As he rode away in the early dawn, with Gaines and Stumpy, he saw that they were in a vast green bowl in the hills, dotted thickly with cattle and horses, with the corrals and buildings at the lower end commanding a narrow outlet into the country below. At the opposite side of the great hollow, a narrow V was cut deep into the encircling mountains.

"They must drive the cattle in here through that pass," he thought.

Riding through the narrow outlet below the corrals, they turned to the right, almost instantly losing sight of the hollow they had left; and then began a stiff climb up the outer wall of the curving ranges enclosing the hollow.

Eggleston was glad to turn his back on Thad Lewis' saturnine face; Fuller's jaded-looking bronco was showing unexpected endurance and spirit; the morning air of the mountains was electric, and a mysterious vitality and creative force seemed to emanate from those stark ranges rolling away in waves to the horizon and finally melting into the smoky gray blue of the early morning sky.

He felt that vitality surging within him, and a great desire to sing or shout, but the two cowmen were riding silently, their eyes staring ahead between their ponies' ears, and, glancing at them, he smiled at his own boyishness and restrained himself.

All day long they rode, and near sunset their trail fanned out on to a huge mountain bench, level as a table and richly green. In the very center of this mountain mesa, a group of ranch buildings clustered.

"Malapai Ranch," Jim Gaines nodded his head in their direction.

Eggleston glanced back over the trail they had come, then his eyes traveled beyond the wide sweep of grassy mesa before the ranch buildings to where—miles away—it dropped gently toward the wall of a mountain range, cleft by a narrow pass.

"Yes," he thought, "that cleft is the V at the upper end of Thad Lewis's hollow. We left his valley at the outlet opposite that gap and have just been circling the outer wall of the hollow all day. They added miles to the trip just to keep me from seeing the short-cut home."

Through fields of tall, lush grasses they reached the huge corrals.

"We'll give that cayuse o' yours a feed an' then turn him loose," said Gaines, stripping the saddle from his own mount and turning him into the corral.

"Turn him loose!" exclaimed Eggleston.

"Sure—tie the stirrups together across the saddle, rein him up to the horn, an' he'll git home in a couple o' days. He'll hurry if he can't eat on the way."

"But what shall I do for a horse?" queried Eggleston wonderingly.

"Reckoned you was goin' to put up here fer some days, stranger, an' besides, Veeder's got plenty o' real horses, not rackabones like this cayuse that even a coyote'd pass up."

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"All right if it's the custom," reluctantly agreed the visitor, "but it seems cruel to send a horse that long trip fixed up the way you say."

"Son," grinned Gaines, "you don't know them cayuses—you can't kill 'em."

"Well, Gaines," sounded a voice behind them, "you sure took your time." It was a cold voice, edged with irritation, and all three men whirled at the sound.

"I had to," said Gaines evenly. "Stopped at Lewis's, an' brought a visitor for you."

"Ah!" and for the first time the speaker looked at Eggleston.

"Mr. Veeder, this is Mr. —" Then Gaines achieved what was meant to be an embarrassed grin, but he looked significantly at the manager. "Durned if he's told me who he is, but he's —— bent on seein' you. Was aimin' to walk if we hadn't offered to see him through."

"Never mind the name—I know it, I reckon," snapped Veeder. "Eggleston, ain't it?" he turned to his young visitor.

"Yes. You received a letter about my coming?" asked Eggleston.

"Sure did. Your dad says you want to learn ranch ways."

"He's learned some ridin' a'ready—ain't you?" grinned Gaines.

"Well, Eggleston," said Veeder, looking him up and down, "you'll room in the bunkhouse—the boys here will introduce you. Gaines, I want to see you up at the house when you've showed young Eggleston the ropes."

Veeder, turning abruptly, tramped off to the ranch-house, which also served him as office.

"He's quite a man, isn't he?" said Eggleston, gazing at the straight, broad back, the well-poised head, of the receding one.

Authority radiated from Veeder, backed by will and cold determination, and all felt it who met him.

"Yeh, he's some boss," said Gaines. "Bill Veeder knows what he wants, an' goes after it."

A moment later, Gaines was telling the new arrival:

"This here's yer bunk, an' that peg's fer your saddle, an' that one fer your duds—'less you allow you'll hang 'em on the floor, like some o' the boys does. By the way, Eggleston, c'n you shoot?"

"I've practised a little with an automatic," he replied nonchalantly.

He sat on his bunk and looked about him.

"Say, Gaines, when do I begin to get busy on this ranch?"

"The boss'll take care o' that," answered the tall puncher carelessly. "Come out an' I'll show you the rest o' the works."

NEXT day, after breakfast, the cook came to the stranger.

"Boss wants to see you at the house."

Eggleston, with a tightening of the nerves, followed the sturdy powerful figure of the cook. Camp cooks, he knew, were often weak and sickly, choosing the job of "grub-slinger" because they were not up to riding—but everything about Malapai ranch seemed strong, from the boss down.

He found Veeder in a large office-sitting-room, his back to the inner wall, sitting before a big flat table strewn with papers. The room was unbelievably comfortable and well-appointed, considering its remoteness. Thick rugs covered the floor, overlaid with beautifully cured skins of mountain goat, mountain lion and grizzly, and the furniture—plain and solid—was expensive of its kind.

"Sit down, Eggleston," said Veeder curtly, laying down his pen and relighting a half-burned cigar.

His hard, unflinching eyes looked at the younger man through the smoke—but Harry Eggleston's lively eye also could be very cool and steady, and he gave back look for look.

"Your father writes that you're aiming to learn ranching. That's all right, and this ranch belongs to your father, but as manager, I'm boss here. Is that clear?"

"Oh, quite," smiled young Eggleston.

"You c'n have every chance to learn, but you'll bunk with the boys, an' take orders from the foreman, Gaines, like any other puncher—when you're able to carry 'em out," he added grimly. "Gaines tells me you made a plucky ride up here, but that you're soft as butter. I'm going to send you out to ride the range with Stumpy Horton, to harden you up. But there's just one thing. I want you to stay where you're sent, and nowhere else. You'll get lost in this jumble of mountains and cañons if you go wandering off by yourself—understand?"

Harry Eggleston smiled.

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"Certainly—that's plain. I'd get lost if I went prospecting round alone before I learn the lay of the land."

Veeder bored him with a cold eye.

"You're not going to do any prospecting round *yet*, young fellow. You're here to work. Well, that's all. I've told Gaines to send you out with Stumpy this morning."

And Veeder took up his pen significantly and turned to the papers on his desk.

Eggleston rose, swung on his heel and left without a word, the blood pounding in his pulses at the coolly insulting manner of the man. But he choked back the words that were struggling to pass his lips, and when he got outside another view appealed to him, and he laughed.

"Getting mad at the old man's hireling! That isn't the way to work this game. But I can see how men would fear as well as hate that Veeder. He's certainly a self-sufficient cuss."

And he hunted up Stumpy.

All the morning they rode—first across the level grassy Malapai lands, then over a steep trail to a smaller grassy bench, where a small bunch of cattle grazed.

"What's that brand on their flanks?" asked Eggleston. "Looks like a K on its side."

Stumpy grinned.

"That's the Malapai brand—the Lazy K—K layin' down, you savvy."

Eggleston pondered a moment.

"Stumpy, I understood the old man had an enormous ranch."

"He sure has," agreed Stumpy. "You c'n ride ten miles in any direction from the bunk-house an' be on his range."

"But where's the cattle, Stumpy?"

"Well," drawled Stumpy, "you can't just exactly see 'em *all* from any one place, but you get 'em all together, an' they make quite a bunch."

"I see," said Eggleston, studying the profile of the other's genial, weakly good-natured face.

"How many punchers does Veeder keep on his pay-roll, Stumpy?"

"Oh, I reckon 'bout fifteen."

"Then Thad Lewis must have to hire quite a number, too, to take care of all those cattle of his."

"Oh, he don't need so many, 'cause he keeps 'em penned in the hollow. He jest hires extra punchers when he makes a drive to the railroad."

Stumpy was growing exceedingly uncomfortable.

To hide that discomfort, and to change the subject, he raised a rather sweet tenor voice in an unprintable cowboy song; one of those many plaintive lays hummed by the trail wanderer on his lonely rides, to which he adds a stanza now and again to suit his mood. Thus some of them have grown to many stanzas from the original one of an unknown author. But a song is easier to interrupt than a heavy silence, and Eggleston cut it short in the middle of a heart-rending line.

"My, but a big herd must have passed here!" he exclaimed, as they crossed a broad trail through the grassland, beaten down and trampled by countless hooves. "Those our cattle, Stumpy?"

"Uh-huh—course," growled Stumpy.

Eggleston laughed good-humoredly.

"You think I'm asking a lot of fool questions, perhaps—but, you see, I'm new at this game, and I'm interested."

"Sure—that's all right," answered the cowboy, mollified.

"That big trail of cattle we just passed were headed toward the ranch, weren't they?"

"Yeh."

"But we didn't see any such bunch before we left Malapai, nor on this upper bench. Did they turn off somewhere?"

"Sure," assented Stumpy quickly. "They was drove on to another bench, an' they'll scatter out like them we passed, an' you'd never reckon they was so many."

"I see," said Eggleston again, and then fell silent.

"CHIEF," said Gaines that night, after Stumpy and Eggleston had ridden in and Stumpy had reported, "Stumpy tells me that the new hand is askin' him a lot o' uncomfortable questions, an' is usin' his eyes. He noticed the trail o' that last herd, an' allows he ain't seen any big lot o' critters round here like the bunch that made that trail. Stumpy ain't any diplomat, an' he says the feller had him guessin' with his fool questions."

Veeder thought a moment, a heavy frown between his eyes.

"Send Stumpy to Navaho Crossing tomorrow, and Eggleston with him. Tell him to take the direct trail through Red Rock Cañon, and keep away from the Hollow. There's a shipment of ranch supplies

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and machinery ordered that can't reach the Crossing for four days. Stumpy is to wait there till it arrives and keep Eggleston with him. That'll give us time to get this last bunch through to Lewis that's due tomorrow. After that we'll have to quit till Eggleston goes home."

"Yeh—but, chief, that feller may be here fer months, an' he'll take a lot o' learnin', if he's aimin' to savvy cattle-ranching." Gaines grinned.

Veeder swung his chair to face his henchman and stared at him meaningly.

"Then it's your job, Gaines, to see that young Eggleston is removed from this ranch *pronto*."

"You don't mean, chief——"

"No, I don't mean what you think, you fool. But you have my permission to haze him within an inch of his life; or if something happens to him that forces him to go home, it won't trouble me any."

"I get you, boss—but I'll leave that till him an' Stumpy gets back from the Crossing," said the tall foreman, looking at his chief steadily. "If there ain't anything else, I'll go give Stumpy his orders fer tomorrow."

Stumpy and Eggleston left next morning for Navaho Crossing, and Eggleston—who was beginning to find his riding legs—so bubbled over with gay spirits that they infected his companion.

"Three or four possible days in Navajo Crossing, Stumpy?" he laughed. "What joy! To sleep on the floor of the hospitable Fuller's emporium, or maybe behind the bar in the Ice Box! What do we do to while the weary hours, my friend? Play pinochle, or casino or poker? That thought is the only drawback to my delight, for I hate cards."

"There's other amusements," announced Stumpy mysteriously.

"Name 'em, Stumpy—name 'em," implored the gay Harry.

"Well," drawled Stumpy, "you c'n git shot full o' hooch first day in, an' wake up to git tanked again. That'll make time pass like a dream till them goods comes in; or, you c'n chase coyotes on the surrounding desert, an' try your new art o' roping on 'em. It's awful excitin'! But the best way to kill time is to go down after breakfast to the water-tank by the railroad track, look at the sunny desert till the train pulls in in the P. M.—then watch it out o' sight. There won't be anything else to look at, 'cause nobody ever gits off at the Crossing."

"Why, Stumpy!" reproachfully. "I got off."

"Yeh, you did, son—an' I'm still wonderin' why."

"To see the wild free West at close range, Stumpy—and to learn to rope a cow."

Stumpy grunted.

"With your money, cow-ropin' wouldn't worry me none."

"Well, you see, Stumpy," said Eggleston plaintively, "if I don't make good at Malapai, mebbeso, as you boys say, the old man won't let me have any money."

Whereat the cowboy glanced at him curiously, shook up his pony and said no more.

When they reached Navaho Crossing in the desert afterglow, it appeared that Stumpy intended to follow his own prescription, for he began to try to drink all the whisky in the Ice Box. In one respect, however, Eggleston found conditions better than he had expected, for Stumpy led him to a little one-room shack of warped boards standing alone out in the sand, which his companion explained was used by any of the Malapai outfit when they found it necessary to stay over night in town.

Eggleston spent a dull evening. After eating supper with Fuller and buying some supplies of him, he returned to the saloon. He soon tired of watching a card game and listening to the vainglorious talk of Stumpy, who was relating to the bartender some impossible adventures; so he left early, taking his way through the heavy sand to the Malapai shack.

At three in the morning, he was aroused by Stumpy who stumbled nosily into the room and threw himself, fully dressed, into the bunk fastened to the opposite wall.

"You're following your own prescription, I see, Stumpy, for killing time in Navaho Crossing," said Eggleston, late next morning as the unsteady cowboy heaved himself up on to the edge of his bunk and groaned.

"What prescription?" Stumpy looked at him dully through bloodshot eyes. "Oh, yeh. An' I'm goin' back fer a hair o' the dog what bit me." And, getting uncertainly to his feet, he walked a weaving trail back to the Ice Box.

No lone desert man was waiting at the water-tank when the train pulled in at three o'clock, and Eggleston guessed that

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the one who had been there on his arrival was a lookout for the Malapai crowd. To his surprize, the brakeman dropped off the train and spoke to him—

"Where's Fuller?"

"In the Ice Box, probably," grinned Eggleston.

The brakeman was hurried.

"Can't wait to hunt him up—late now. Any of the Malapai boys in town?"

"Stumpy Horton and myself—but Stumpy's in no condition to talk business," he smiled.

"Got a consignment of machinery and supplies for your outfit—I'll dump 'em here, and you can take care of 'em."

"All right," answered Eggleston.

That was supposed to be Lon Fuller's duty, but Lon, not expecting anything, was not in sight.

The brakeman quickly checked the bill of lading; Eggleston signed, and the slow train puffed away into the desert heat. Then he sought his companion at the Ice Box, and laid a hand on the cowboy's moist shoulder:

"Stumpy, what do we do with that freight when it does arrive? Do we leave it lying in the sun until the boss sends down a freighter to haul it to Malapai?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well, then, Stumpy, that shipment is here and signed for, and now we have no reason to hang 'round here any longer."

The puncher, two-thirds drunk, looked at him stupidly.

"Mus' hang 'round—can't leave f'r three-four days. Boss's orders." And, tilting the bottle before him, he took a long drink.

Eggleston sat down opposite him at the small table, and looked him steadily in the eye. When he spoke, his voice had the edge of command, and in the cowboy's bemused brain he connected the tone somehow with Veeder.

"Stumpy, we came here to wait for a shipment. It's here, and all O. K., so we're going back to the ranch. Your boss didn't tell you to take a three-days' drunk after your errand was done. You're half-seas over, but you can ride, and we're starting now."

Stumpy blinked.

"Ain' 'low no tenderfoot talk tha' way t'me. B'sides, trail's too dark ter see."

"There's four hours of daylight left, and tonight's full moon. If we take the short trail through Red Rock, we'll be at the ranch by dawn. Come on."

The cowboy was used to taking orders, and all his life had followed a superior will, either for good or bad, so he struggled to his feet and, guided by Eggleston, stumbled through the sand to the small corral which backed up against their shack. Eggleston realized the value of whirlwind action with one of Stumpy's caliber, so he threw the saddles on the two broncos; boosted his companion on to his horse, and before Stumpy's vacillating will could settle into drunken obstinacy he was lurching in the saddle on his way to the low foot-hills a mile away.

But Harry Eggleston was not concerned about the half-drunken cowboy, for he knew that, in his present condition, Stumpy was more secure than he would have been in a chair, and the cold desert night wind would sober him. What was concerning him was Veeder's orders to Stumpy to kill three or four days in Navajo Crossing, which the puncher, with drunken carelessness, had revealed. He felt sure that something was staged to happen while he was absent, and that he was to be kept away until the coast was clear.

"Well, we'll find out when we get there—but I'm betting somebody'll be surprized."

And he dismissed the subject from his mind.

HOUR after hour they plodded upward through the foot-hills, and now they were entering the region of cañons and bare rocky ridges. The mountain peaks, and the lofty crests, were edged with sunset gold, but the cañons were already filled with purple shadow—and Stumpy's brain was clarifying, for he was beginning to growl. Eggleston grinned to himself.

"If he'd been at this stage when we vamoosed, I'd never have been able to get him away from the Crossing."

But his grin changed suddenly.

"Hey, Stumpy, what you doing?" he shouted—for the morose cowboy had left the trail and was putting his bronco down a steep, rocky slope that bordered a tiny gulch where a thin stream ran.

"Goin' ter get a drink," Stumpy growled in a sullen tone.

Then it all happened in a minute, while Eggleston waiting on the trail behind,

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watched Stumpy drop down to the boulder-studded creek bank, where blue shadows made the bed of the gulch dusky. He saw him swing himself with unusual clumsiness out of the saddle, reaching for the ground with his right foot, which met, instead, a thin, sharp upthrust of rock; that unsuspecting right foot turned, with Stumpy's whole weight upon it, flinging him off his balance. His body plunged sidewise, his right leg snapping as his thigh ground against a sharp-edged boulder, as would a dead branch broken across one's knee; and the cowboy lay among the rocks, screaming with pain, while his pony, with dragging reins, drank thirstily of the trickle of water.

Eggleston left his bronco on the trail, plunged down the steep hillside and bent over the fallen man.

"Reckon the danged laig is busted," Stumpy groaned, and the other saw that the right leg was doubled under the heavy figure in a distorted position. Eggleston pulled off his hat and scratched his head in puzzlement, then he filled that hat with water and gave the injured man a drink.

"If you'd let me have my spree out, this wouldn't 'a' happened," Stumpy complained.

"How far are we from anywhere?" asked Eggleston, ignoring the plaint.

" 'Bout thirteen miles, shortest trail, from Malapai."

"No place nearer?"

"Soda Flats' 'bout five miles east. But the boss'd sure give me —— if you went there."

"Why?"

But Stumpy, looking stupid and confused, did not answer.

"Any doctor in Soda Flats, Stumpy?"

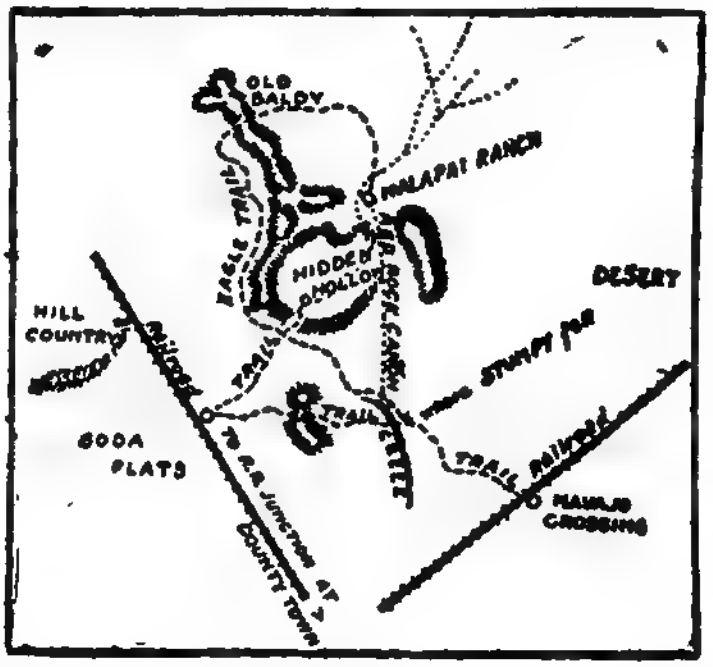
"Sure—there's a sawbones. Hangs out at the hotel."

"All right—up with you."

Eggleston, swerving the pony up close, with his left side toward them, managed to get Stumpy's left foot in the stirrup, then heaved the half-inert figure up into the saddle and lifted the helpless right leg over as gently as he could, while Stumpy cursed at the pain. Fortunately, the bronco was tired as well as gentle, so he braced himself against the clumsy mounting and stood still.

Roping Stumpy firmly in the saddle, Eggleston led the bronco up to the trail. Then he roped his own bronco to the other's saddle-horn, so his mount could follow behind, and started up the rough track on foot, walking alongside, one hand on the injured rider's hip to steady him. And, looking up to the mighty walls ahead, he saw that the rim of gold on their topmost crests had vanished: now those crests towered black and lonely against the green and rose of the afterglow.

Over a grade so steep and rough that a vigorous rider on the average bronco could make less than three miles an hour, they plodded slowly. Darkness came down swiftly, for though the full moon was shining behind those mighty walls, it would not shine above them for an hour yet, and in the blackness the horses felt their footing with deliberate slowness.



The trail narrowed as the way grew steeper, so that Eggleston could not walk beside Stumpy and steady him, but was forced to walk ahead, the broncos following in single file.

And suddenly they were in a narrow saddle in the mountains, with lofty buttes towering above them, while they looked down on a scene of wild beauty, lighted by the white desert moon. In the center of the wide valley, ahead and far below, gleamed a tiny cluster of points of red light, looking insignificant in the moon's ivory splendor.

"We're over the summit, now, an' that there's Soda Flats," said Stumpy, breaking a long silence.

An hour later they were plodding wearily down the center of Soda Flats' one wide street, puffs of dust rising about them in clouds of moon-tinged smoke. Eggleston halted before the only two-story building

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in town—the hotel—and entered the office, leaving Stumpy outside.

"Is the doctor in? Got a patient for him outside," he said to the clerk.

"You're in luck, stranger. Doc's just got in this minute from a long trip. I'll get him out here right away."

"Thanks," said Eggleston, and turned to scan the loungers in the office for one who could help him in with Stumpy, when his glance was drawn to a corner by the steady regard of a man sitting there.

"Hello, Gaines," he said, and there was relief in his voice as he stepped up to the foreman. "Stumpy's outside with a broken leg. Give me a hand in with him, will you?"

"How come you're here?" Gaines asked, rising and making for the door, however.

"That'll keep. We'll hold the inquisition after that leg of Stumpy's is fixed up."

Tall as Gaines was, Eggleston's eyes were nearly level with his own, and the foreman read in them such fearlessness and strength of will that he did not reply, but helped Stumpy into the hall, where the doctor met and ushered them into his office, which was on the ground floor.

As the young surgeon worked over the injured leg, he talked.

"You boys are in luck to find me. Been twenty-five miles across the valley in a car, then seven miles up the Cerro Grande to a prospect, to fix up a miner. Poor devil fell eighty-five feet straight as a plummet down a shaft. Broke nearly all his bones—and by gad, he wanted a pipe soon as he came to—fixed him up best I could; left him there—kill him to move him. Nearly broke all my bones getting to him. Wall-eyed bronc threw me on my back, then beat it—had to walk last three miles. Great life—a doctor's!"

"But, doc," exclaimed Eggleston, "eighty-five foot drop! That chap can't live!"

"Think he will. Doesn't know how bad he's hurt, and doesn't want to die. Clean blood. Most all his ribs broken—and one foot—but he didn't make nearly as much fuss as Stumpy, here. Stumpy's leg is broken above the knee, but his thigh was wrenched, I reckon. That's where he gets most of the pain—and the riding afterward—but Stumpy'll live to be hung for horse-stealing yet." Giving a final dexterous fold and knot to his bandage, he stood up and surveyed his patient. "He stays here tonight, of course. Simmons, give me a room on the ground floor for him, will you"—turning to the clerk who had watched the bandaging—"and will you boys give him a hand to get to bed?"

AFTER Eggleston had seen the injured puncher safely in bed, and had discussed the care of him with the doctor, he turned to the Malapai foreman.

"Now, Gaines, we'll have that little talk, if you like. Come outside where it's cool and quiet."

He led the way out into the still moonlight, through a crowd of curious men who had pressed into the office on hearing about the accident. Eggleston led the way out of earshot of the hotel, then turned and faced Gaines.

"Now, Jim Gaines, I want to know, first: Why I am sent to Navaho Crossing to keep the company of a drunken cow-puncher for four days, whether or no? You didn't give me those orders, but you gave them to Stumpy."

"Say, young feller," blustered Gaines, "you know who I am? I'm your foreman."

Eggleston, ignoring the bluster, asked patiently:

"Will you tell me why, when the shipment came today to Navaho, Stumpy wanted to kill time for three days more? He said he had those orders. Why were they given?"

Gaines's eyes narrowed, and his hand strayed to the butt of his gun:

"You want to know too much fer a kid puncher. You're under my orders. You git back to Malapai in the morning."

Eggleston laughed outright at the gesture and the words.

"They don't shoot men in cold blood, nowadays, Gaines, just because they happen to be in a strange town where they're not wanted—but you might as well know that the automatic in my pocket has been trained on your upper left-hand vest-pocket. I wasn't taking any chances, for I've heard you are a killer. But why may I go back now, when I was to be kept away from Malapai for four days? I may go back tomorrow, but not in your company."

Tense and alert, he watched Gaines, their eyes burning black in the moonlight as they held each other for a moment; then Gaines' hand dropped away from his gun and he turned away with a curse. Eggleston swung on his heel, returned to the hotel and

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knocked on Dr. Ellicott's office door. He found the surgeon with his feet on a chair, smoking his pipe and reading a magazine.

"Doc," he asked, "is the telegraph operator here above reproach?"

"Well, son"—a whimsical light glinted in the young medico's eye—"I haven't anything personal on him—and I think he'd play straight if you made it worth his while."

Harry Eggleston looked steadily in the surgeon's eyes— laughing eyes, but steady as his own, and candid, and he resolved to take a chance.

"Doc, you know anything about Bill Veeder and the Malapai ranch?" he asked.

Ellicott tamped the tobacco down in his pipe, relighted it, and looked at Eggleston curiously, through the smoke.

"A doctor in my situation ought to be diplomatic, but, despite the fact that you rode here in company with one of Veeder's punchers, I don't mind saying that I regard it as a rotten outfit, from manager down."

"I'm living there," grinned Eggleston.

Ellicott's long look at the other was one of cool appraisal. When it was ended, he stated,

"A physician, sir, learns much of human nature in the course of his duties, and it is my opinion that you don't belong in that bunch. I diagnose you as a lark in a hang-bird's nest—with the accent on the hang."

"You're dead right, doc. Would you back up that opinion by helping me?"

"I might," answered Ellicott cautiously.

"Got anything on for tomorrow?" pursued Eggleston.

"Stumpy is my only patient for the moment."

"Then could you, as his physician, order Stumpy taken home tomorrow in a double buckboard, and make it imperative that you attend him on the trip? I expect to go back to Malapai myself tomorrow."

Dr. Ellicott scented mystery, adventure, and he was young—also, he liked this alert, capable stranger, so he looked preternaturally sober, but his eyes twinkled as he answered:

"There is no hospital in Soda Flats, and it is inadvisable to leave the patient here unattended. He would be laid up for weeks in the hotel; and I think it necessary that I go home with the patient, to care for him on the way. May I have your company?"

"Fine, doc! By the way, will your driver be heeled?"

"The one I have in mind is a friend of mine—he is also an old-timer who shoots from the hip."

"How about you, doc?"

"As one whose profession is to save life, not maim or destroy, I never go armed, but I own a little pop-gun."

"Will you bring it along? Sorry to disturb you so late. Good night."

And Eggleston strolled out into the office, selected two of the least deadly looking smokes from the cigar case, swung back to the doctor's room again and tapped on the door.

"Excuse me, doc, but I can't sleep, and I want company. This will keep you awake." He offered the surgeon a "Desert Nightingale."

"I'll take it from you," grinned Ellicott, "but I know 'em. They appeal to the sense of smell as the real Desert Nightingale does to the sense of hearing.

"Say, for a chap who's been through what you have today, you're pretty restless," said the doctor curiously, as they walked up the board footway paralleling the railroad tracks.

The lowing of cattle came to them from the corrals bordering the tracks, and cattle chutes were strung along the right of way.

The moon was in the zenith as they halted at one of the corrals, resting their elbows idly on the top bar and chatting in desultory fashion. By the clear moonlight, the brands on the flanks of the cattle were plainly to be read. Eggleston stared at several with an intense concentration, then strolled to the next pen, and to the next. Then he yawned:

"I really begin to feel sleepy, but I've got one thing to do before I turn in. Where'll I find that telegraph operator?"

"Still in his wigwam—he sleeps in the room back of his telegraph office."

"Thanks, doc, for your company—and now I'll escort you back to your hotel."

Leaving him there, Eggleston walked slowly down past the hotel to the little building by the track, which was freight, express and telegraph office combined. As he entered the dimly lighted room, a young fellow in his shirt-sleeves came out from an inner room, smoking a cigaret. Eggleston wrote rapidly on a telegraph blank and handed the slip over to the operator. He looked keenly at the young agent and said crisply:

"If any eye but yours sees this, I'll know

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it, and if I don't get a reply by noon tomorrow, I shall know how to act. The people to whom this message is addressed know how to handle those who tamper with their private business—and so do I. Savvy?"

A dull flush mounted into the young fellow's face as he scanned the message; then he turned to his instrument without replying, and clicked off the message.

"I shall be here by noon to get an answer. Thank you. Good night," said Eggleston.

He stopped in to see Stumpy, then climbed to his room and in a few minutes was asleep.

EGGLESTON breakfasted late, so it was nearly nine o'clock when he stepped from the hotel to look about the town. Cattle were being loaded aboard the cars, amid much bellowing, moaning and shouting, but Eggleston glanced in that direction with only perfunctory interest.

He bent his steps to the agent's office and found that official busy with bills of lading, interspersed with the clicking of messages sent and received. He looked up, flushing, when he saw who his visitor was.

"Your reply hasn't come," he said shortly, bending again to his invoices.

"Thanks, I'll wait, if you don't mind," said Eggleston, pleasantly, dropping into a chair and picking up an ancient newspaper.

Gaines came in, scowled at him and sent off a wire advising the shipment of cattle, but as the operator's room was also the railroad waiting-room, the foreman had no reason to suppose Eggleston's business there was other than to idle away the morning.

He left, giving Eggleston a hard stare as he went out, and shortly afterward the agent called—

"Here's your message, Mr. Eggleston."

There was a note of respect in his voice.

The message ran:

To H. Eggleston, Soda Flats.

"Lazy K, Eggleston, owner—Malapai Ranch. Star and Bar, Thaddeus Lewis owner—Hidden Hollow Ranch.

Other brands you mention not in any American stock breeders' register. This association deeply interested. Forward any information.

Taruhama Cattle Association.

As Eggleston pocketed the slip, he turned to Brenton, the operator, and said in a kindlier tone:

"You'll pardon the way I felt obliged to talk to you last night? The fact is, if certain men knew what I am after, I wouldn't live long—but they are going to get theirs, and if you've had any dealings with them, cut 'em out. If they've scared you into doing—certain things—don't be scared any more. That's a word of warning, and it's kindly meant."

The operator, who was little more than a boy, was trembling with nervousness, and great beads of sweat stood on his forehead:

"I'll be glad to see the last of that crowd, Mr. Eggleston," he said with unfeigned earnestness.

"Then, Brenton, if I should send you a message by another hand, will it be sent off without any one knowing about it?"

"You bet your life it will," blurted Brenton.

As Eggleston dawdled up the board sidewalk after he left the station, with the air of one who was finding time hard to kill, Gaines approached from the direction of the hotel. He halted before the younger man, hands on hips, and looked him up and down.

"Havin' a nice time loafin' around town?" he sneered.

"Fine, dear boy. But it palls. I'm going back to Malapai today."

"Better not go, unless you're aimin' to take orders from me," he warned.

"You forget, Gaines, that I'm my father's son."

"Yeh—so'm I."

"Ah, but not the same father, Gaines!"

"Say, you're gettin' real cocky, ain't yer? But even yer father's son ain't goin' to make any difference up there."

And with a wolfish grin Gaines passed on.

"Why," said Eggleston with a smile, as he turned and watched the foreman's tall sinewy figure, "it seems as though James was trying to scare me into taking the train for somewhere else."

He saw no more of the Malapai foreman as he spent the rest of the morning chatting with Dr. Ellicott, for whom he had conceived an instant liking.

Shortly after noon a big double buckboard left the hotel. Eggleston sat beside the driver, Jim Reynolds, a tall stringy fellow, with a straw-colored mustache, a brick red face and a rollicking blue eye. The doctor sat with Stumpy on the rear seat, and the two broncos, which had carried Eggleston and Stumpy from Navaho, trotted behind, haltered to the rear rail.

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Eggleston turned to the driver, who had "old-timer" written all over him.

"My name's Eggleston—Harry to my friends."

Reynolds spat a stream of tobacco juice over the wheel, then turned friendly eyes to the younger man.

"Meetcha. Fellers I like I 'low to call me Jim."

"Jim," said Eggleston in a low voice, after they left Soda Flats behind, "you know the road that cuts by the mouth of the hollow where Lewis runs his cattle?"

"Sure."

"Well, the trail that runs from that road along the outside slope of the hills that wall that hollow is the way I want to go. From that trail, a man could climb through the pines to the crest of the ridge and look down on Lewis's corrals, couldn't he?"

"You got it right, boy."

"Jim, Doc Ellicott says you're a friend of his, so I'm going to put myself in your hands. When we get on that trail, you and I are going to fork those broncs hitched behind, lose the buckboard, and climb from the trail to the crest. I want to see what Thad Lewis is doing, without being seen. Are you game?"

"I packed the old Winchester," said Jim complacently.

"You won't need it, Jim," laughed Eggleston. "This is a scouting expedition." He leaned over the back of his seat. "Doc, can you drive?"

"What—me drive? I come from Kentucky, sir, and have held the ribbons over the backs of thoroughbreds such as this country rarely sees."

He winked at Eggleston.

"The doc's a good feller," said Jim, his talk directed at his horses' ears, "except when he gits talkin' horse. He calls all broncs 'skates,' an' he thereby shows his ignorance. Mebbeso he don't savvy that some o' these 'skates' has the old Spanish barb in their blood, an' later on some of it got diluted with that there weak Kentucky stock."

"Never mind, Jim. I want to ask the doc to take the reins a little farther on, while you and I stretch our legs on those broncs."

"I am used to driving *horses*, but to oblige you, I will," grinned Ellicott.

"Horses?" snorted Reynolds. "I seen an endurance race once between one o' those Blue Grass Hambletonians and a desert-bred named Injun Boy, an' by the time Injun Boy had romped home, head up an' tail wavin', the buzzards was feedin' on old Blue Grass. But say, pardner—when we git to the foot o' that steep grade ahead, le's give the doc a chance to see what he can do with *real* horses."

At the foot of the grade, Reynolds and Eggleston took to the broncos, the doctor climbing forward and taking the lines.

"Don't drive them broncs to death, doc," called Reynolds, "we'll mosey along slow, an' if you lose us, we'll catch up with you later."

When the buckboard, after straining up the grade, rattled around a jutting buttress of rock, Jim nodded his head toward the pines on the right side of the road, and in a moment both riders were screened from the road, their fresh mounts scrambling up hill over a thick carpet of pine needles almost without sound. Near the summit, they tethered their ponies in the pines and crawled up a steep, bare rock slope to the jagged, sawtooth crest. Between the pinked and crenelated rock shapes on the very rim, they saw as they lay down and peered over, a vast green hollow dotted with moving cattle and, almost directly beneath them, the corrals.

Loud bawlings and bellowings came up to them, for cattle were being branded. As a heifer was thrown on its side, its flank exposed for the hot iron, Eggleston whipped from an inner pocket a pair of small but powerful glasses.

"Ah!" he breathed when he had the lenses focused—and after the iron had seared into the animal's flank, through hair and flesh, he chuckled.

"Lemme in on the fun, boy," said Jim, watching intently.

"I want you to be in on it, Jim. Here, watch the next branding and tell me what you see," and he handed over the glasses.

"By the Great Horn Spoon," Jim muttered, "if them fellers ain't brandin' a K back to back with the Lazy K, makin' a star out of it, with a bar underneath! Yeh, that's Lewis's brand. Star and Bar. So that's where your pa's cattle is goin', son. An' here comes one with a brand I don't know. Yep—they're jest puttin' their star brand on it, too."

"Jim," said Eggleston, his eyes bright with excitement, "will you send a wire for me soon as you get into Soda Flats?"

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He began writing rapidly in a tiny notebook. Jim answered doubtfully—

"Son, if it goes through Brenton's hands, them *hombres* are liable to see it."

"Not any more, Jim. Brenton's promised to be good, and I believe him."

"Well, mebbeso—but Brenton's awful gun-shy."

"I've got to chance it. Here, read this, Jim, and keep it under your hat."

Eggleston handed the old-timer his scribbled message. It was addressed to the fighting sheriff at the county seat and ran:

Got the goods. Send six to Soda Flats. See Jim Reynolds before you make a move. Come a-running.
EGGLESTON.

"When Jack Rhett receives that they'll come a-running—and, Jim, bring 'em up to the Malapai over the Eagle Trail and across Old Baldy. It's the back entrance and few know it outside the outfit, except an old long-horn like you—that is, if you care to be in on it," added Eggleston.

"Want ter be in on it!" blazed Reynolds. "Them *hombres* has sp'iled the map o' this country fer years, an' my right hand's jest been itchin' to haul on a rope, like we did in the good old days—but all they gits now is the pen, fer murder an' arson an' petty an' mighty larceny, an' a few dozen more crimes."

"All right, Jim," grinned Eggleston, "I thought you'd be willing to help."

They climbed down across the rocky slope, then regained their mounts and threaded their way down through the steeply growing pines to the road, their ponies fairly sitting down and sliding over the long slippery needles.

When they had climbed a long, steep grade and galloped across the level stretch of road beyond, they saw the buckboard. Stumpy was fast asleep, and the doctor was waiting for them. He glanced inquiringly at Eggleston, who nodded his head in a contented way. Then they climbed back into the buckboard, after tying their broncos behind.

"Now look at them horses!" complained Reynolds. "They savvy the touch of a green hand on the lines. All lathered up an' nervous: a horseman would know that gittin' horses worked up thataway wears 'em down quicker'n a long trip."

"Here! Take your barbs, Jim," grinned the doctor, handing over the reins.

BILL VEEDER was on his porch, smoking a cigar when Reynolds drove up. He made no move, no comment, but waited till the doctor and Eggleston had helped Stumpy up the steps and into the light shining through door and windows, for night had long since fallen.

Wicked malice flamed in his eyes when he saw Eggleston.

"Well, Eggleston, I thought you were to remain in Navaho for that shipment?"

"Shipment came yesterday—I checked it off myself—but Stumpy, here, was so drunk that I had to force him to leave, so when he broke a leg, I hit with him for Soda Flats, being nearer than here. That explains Jim Reynolds, Dr. Ellicott and the buckboard."

"See Jim Gaines in Soda Flats?"

"Yes. He seemed to be busy shipping cattle."

Veeder turned to the others.

"How do, doctor. Well, Stumpy, you made a mess of things. Sorry for the leg, of course. Doctor, I'll have beds made up here for you and Stumpy. I s'pose he'd better stay here for the night instead of the bunk-house. Eggleston, go rouse out the cook and have it attended to."

The young fellow snapped erect, at the studiedly insulting tone. His eyes bored into Veeder's for an instant, his color high; then, recalling the rôle he had to play, he swung about and tramped from the room.

The kitchen was in one end of the long bunk-house, the cook's sleeping-quarters behind the kitchen.

"Hello, Sourdough," said Eggleston, rousing the heavy-browed, muscular cook. "Boss wants you up at his house, to fix quarters for Stumpy and Doctor Ellicott. Stumpy's home with a busted leg. Where're all the boys?"

"All out ridin' night herd."

"All of 'em, cookie! Isn't that unusual?"

"Mebbeso," said Conway shortly.

"Well, I've got one good horse-wrangler to keep me company here tonight, anyway."

"Yeh?" interrogated Conway.

"Yes, Jim Reynolds from Soda Flats." By the light of the smoky lamp, Eggleston saw an ugly gleam for a moment in Conway's sullen eyes. "Know him, cookie?"

Conway smoothed his face with an effort.

"I've met him," he said.

"Well, hustle those blankets up, will

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you? The boss is waiting to feed his guests and put 'em to bed."

Eggleston left to help Reynolds unhitch and turn his team into the corral.

"Know a feller named Conway, Jim?" he asked as they were hanging up the harness in the corral-shed.

"Conway? Sure do—why?"

"He's here—admitted, without any pleasure, that he'd met you. Cook for this outfit."

Jim Reynolds stared.

"Cook! ——! Conway's a pretty slick gun-fighter—I beat him to the draw once in them days when I used ter go out nights. Mebbeso—" and the old-timer's face lighted with pleasant anticipation—"when I get back I'll give him a chance to try it again. He's sure a bad *hombre.*"

When Conway returned from serving the men at the ranch-house, he found Eggleston and Reynolds in the bunk-house, waiting hungrily for a belated supper. He met Reynolds' cool nod with a surly one, viciously slammed some cold food on the big table and left them without a word. They talked little and guardedly, for Conway was within hearing—probably listening—and after supper and a smoke, they tumbled into their bunks.

Reynolds left at the crack of dawn with the doctor, promising to send Eggleston's wire by the late afternoon.

In the morning, the ranch-buildings seemed strangely quiet. Eggleston missed the rude jests and horse-play at breakfast, which Conway slapped before him grudgingly. Eggleston cared for the few horses left in the corrals; attended to Stumpy's leg according to directions which Ellicott had given him; then sat down in the shadow of the bunk-house with a magazine and a cigaret.

The stories could not divert his racing thoughts. He flung the journal down, sprang up, pulled his saddle off its hook and went to the horse-corral. He would take a gallop across the mesa and relax his taut nerves. He was cinching the saddle on a big, fleet bronco when a cold, hard voice spoke behind him.

"Are you aiming to leave us, Mr. Eggleston?"

The young man turned and looked into Veeder's threatening eyes.

"No—just going for a ride. Anything I can do for you?"

"Yes," snapped Veeder, "take the saddle off that bronc and stay here. I told you I couldn't have any prospecting 'round." Then he added, as on second thought, "You're the only man on the ranch, except the cook."

"Oh, all right," answered Eggleston, pulling the saddle off and starting to leave the corral.

"One minute, Eggleston." Veeder strove to make his tone kindly. "What do you find here to make you want to stay? Gaines tells me that the boys don't like you, and they are threatening to haze the life out of you when they get back. Take my tip and beat it."

"Nobody seems to want me," complained Harry, "but I reckon I'll stick, Mr. Veeder. I told the old man I would."

"Suit yourself," snapped Veeder, turning away.

IN THE late afternoon, the boys came riding home. They were in hilarious mood, and came trooping up to the bunk-house, saddles on shoulders, laughing and jesting. They halted at sight of Eggleston, sitting on a bench outside the bunk-house. His long legs were stretched straight before him, his hat rested on the bridge of a prominent nose, his hands were in his pockets and a cigaret drooped from one corner of his mouth.

"Well, well! Here's his father's son come back," grinned long Tim Galloway, halting before Eggleston and looking down on him as at some curious insect.

Eggleston pushed his hat back and looked up.

"You had one, too, didn't you, Galloway?"

"Had what?"

"Why, a father," answered Eggleston in a surprized tone.

The other men tittered, and the long puncher dropped his saddle. His wide grin disappeared, and his vicious mouth closed to a thin slit.

"Get up here, an' I'll introduce yer to my father's son."

"Not yet, Tim. This is where the hazing begins, I suppose. I'll give you your chance, but I'm going to begin at the top. Your big chief was kind enough to tell me that I was to have the life hazed out of me when you got home. Gaines told him, so Gaines must be behind it."

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Eggleston rose lazily. Standing thus, he looked noticeably tall though slender. His lively eyes burned with the light of battle, but he laughed gaily—he was coming to grips at last! Tim Galloway had once fought with a man who laughed when he fought—it accounted for a missing tooth—so he answered:

"All right. I'll be waitin'."

Eggleston turned to Gaines.

"You heard me, Gaines. I'm no gun-fighter, but if you'll remove your gun and knife, and fight man-fashion, I'm ready for the hazing to begin."

Gaines stepped through the ring of men who had dropped their saddles and were rolling smokes. A contemptuous grin creased his usually grim face, as he unbuckled his belt and dropped belt and gun.

"Haze you, kid? Sure, I'll begin it—an' end it. You been gettin' too fresh an' curious, an' I won't leave nothin' fer Tim to finish."

Eggleston looked him in the eye and laughed again—but after that he was too busy to do more than smile, for his laugh upset Gaines's nonchalance, and he sprang for his young opponent with fingers viciously curled at the ends of long powerful arms. Eggleston wasn't used to that sort of fighting, and he barely missed those clawing fingers by stepping quickly aside, at the same time rocking Gaines's head back by a swift blow on his heavy jaw.

A smart blow on the jaw in a bout will stir the blood, even when delivered by a friend, but when it was thudded in with the force of a pile-driver by the "kid" whom Gaines had promised to finish, it made the foreman see red, and he lunged at Eggleston with murder in his eye.

"I ought to hit below the belt for those eye-gouging tactics, Jim—but I'll make it the heart."

A lightning stroke under the cowman's heart made him grunt—but the powerful, clawing hands had ripped Harry from elbow to wrist, tearing the shirt from his shoulder, the blood flowing from long, deep gouges.

Then the smile left Harry Eggleston's face, and his lively, laughing eyes burned twin points of hot blue light as his small hard fists drove in and out like lightning. Gaines was hard as cured rawhide, but he had always depended on his gun in a fight. Forgetting his clawing, he used his arms to shield his body from that human battering-ram, but when he defended his heart, Eggleston blacked his eyes, one after the other.

In a few minutes Gaines was weaving about uncertainly, wabbling on his feet and groping blindly, when Eggleston, summoning all his strength for one mighty effort, sent a blow home behind the ear that fairly lifted the foreman off his feet, and Gaines slithered down quietly in a heap and lay still, amid a profound silence.

"That's some punch you pack, Mr.—er—Eggleston," drawled a voice from without the circle, and the cowboys jerked around, startled at the sound of Lon Fuller's voice, for they had been so absorbed in the fight that the storekeeper had driven up behind them on the soft sand and watched its finish without being noticed.

Beside him, in a single buckboard, sat a young fellow of about twenty-four or five. He was a good-looking boy, the features bold, though a trifle arrogant, and Eggleston turned from the fallen Gaines to stare at him fascinated, for the face was the face of an older man he knew, though on that older face he had never seen the shadow of fear such as now overlay this young fellow's.

"Thought you didn't have means of bringing any one up to Malapai, Fuller," said Eggleston meaningly.

"Well, you see, I got the simon-pure article here."

With which cryptic speech, he shook the lines over his broncos and drove on to the steps of Veeder's house. Eggleston watched the receding buckboard, then drew a long breath and turned to the crowd.

"Will that be enough for now, or do I get hazed some more?" he demanded.

"You done plenty fer tonight, kid. You c'n go to yer crib an' sleep peaceful—also there ain't no one aimin' to 'haze the life out o' you,' except mebbe Gaines—an' he's sure done it," said one.

"I'm glad to hear that, boys," said Eggleston, "but I have my word to keep. Well, Tim, are you ready?"

Long Tim Galloway grinned sheepishly.

"If you allow that you're yer pa's own boy, I sure allow I'm mine—an' we'll let it go at that."

"All right, Galloway." But Eggleston looked at the tall puncher thoughtfully, and said to himself that he'd have liked Galloway better if he had been ready to

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come to scratch. Then he turned to Gaines, who lay still where he had dropped.

"Somebody help me to put Gaines in his bunk."

And he lifted the unconscious man by his shoulders, while others jumped to help.

Conway, who had missed the fight, came in from serving supper at the big house as the men were washing up, and told Eggleston—

"The big chief wants to see you in his office after grub-time."

Then he started to dish up supper to the hungry men. Their hilarity had simmered down into thoughtful, wondering silence, but Eggleston sensed a new friendliness in the air, a certain indefinable respect for himself—for Jim Gaines had ruled them all with a heavy hand. And while they ate ravenously and called for more, the cook grumbled:

"Too —— much company. First it's the doc—and Stumpy bein' fed with a spoon—now it's Fuller an' a new lad—not to speak o' you cowherds!"

Gaines still lay in his bunk, conscious and cursing, while Conway ministered to his hurts, as Eggleston left the bunk-house after supper. His short walk to the ranch-house was taken up in absorbed wonder.

"How comes that kid here now? It isn't like the old man to mix things this way. Well—" and he grinned to himself in the darkness and shook his shoulders, dismissing the puzzle—"I'm due to find out pretty soon." He climbed the porch steps, passed through the open doorway and into the office.

VEEDER sat at his table, smoking and talking to the young man who had arrived that evening. The visitor lolled deep in the easiest chair in the room, a cigaret in one corner of his mouth. Both turned as Eggleston entered, the youth with angry curiosity in his stare, the older man with a cold speculative light gleaming from between his narrowed lids.

"Where's Gaines?" he snapped. "I sent word by Conway for him to come with you."

"Jim isn't feeling well," Eggleston's expression was concerned. "I left him groaning in his bunk."

"Gaines sick!"

"Well, you see, Veeder, I mentioned to the boys about that hazing you kindly warned me of, and I thought I'd start at the top, so I invited Gaines to begin. But Jim don't fight fair," he complained, looking soberly at his bandaged arm. "He nearly ripped the muscles out of my right forearm with his claws—before he went to sleep."

A dull red crept up slowly through Veeder's brown cheeks to his forehead, where the veins stood out like ropes.

"You —— interloper," he said, choosing his words, "you come here posing as Eggleston's son, and I take you on trust—then you sneak and spy around, and do your best to disrupt the ranch. This gentleman is Henry Eggleston's son—now who are you? And what's your game?"

"My name happens to be Eggleston, and my game, as Henry Eggleston wrote you, is to learn all about ranching at Mahapai that I can."

"It's a lie!" shouted the young stranger, shooting bolt upright from his negligent attitude. "I am Henry Eggleston's son, and you're an imposter."

Eggleston fixed the other claimant with a fiery fighting eye.

"Sonny, I've just licked a better man than you for saying less; but let me ask you, did Henry Eggleston write a letter saying you were coming here?"

"Yes, he did," the other shouted.

"Well, then," said Eggleston slowly, almost drawling, "I reckon you're the liar."

"Here," broke in Veeder, "that's enough. Mr. Eggleston, will you go down to the bunk-house and tell two of the boys to come here on the run, and bring a rope with them. I'll watch this bird—and hustle!"

The young man, smiling maliciously, darted away, returning almost immediately with Galloway and another cowboy.

"Rope that fellow, boys," Veeder ordered curtly, "and throw him into the cellar under the bunk-house until I decide what to do with him."

Eggleston was quickly roped and hustled out between the two punchers, leaving Veeder frowning in perplexity—but the young man calling himself Henry Eggleston's son smirked with satisfaction.

Eggleston smiled cheerfully as he left, bore himself indifferently when he was led through the men in the bunk-house; but when he was thrust down the narrow stairway into the cellar beneath, a sudden depression seized him. All his fine plans destroyed by the unexpected appearance of that boy! Rhett would come, and Reynolds, expecting him to be there to show

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them the ropes—and there wasn't a soul to even tell them where he was hidden.

Eggleston, a self-contained young fellow, usually, now gnawed with his strong white teeth futilely at the ropes which bound him until his lips bled; but the lashings were of green plaited rawhide. He gave over, finally, and sat on a pile of potato sacks, staring moodily into the dark.

In the blackness, his sense of hearing was sharpened, and through the heavy flooring he could hear, for hours, as it seemed to him, a mumble of men's voices, with now and then a word, but the words were guarded—then he sensed a sudden stillness that had fallen on the room above him; the outer door slammed, there was a trampling of heavy feet, then stillness again, broken by a loud, booming voice.

"You fellers all keep quiet, an' reach fer the roof. You there in the bunk! Quit reachin' fer that gun! Where's that boy? Where's Eggleston? If any *hombre's* hurt a hair o' that boy's head, I'll send him to —— tonight."

Eggleston's heart gave a leap—it was Jack Rhett's voice. Good old Jack! Jumping up, he stumbled through the darkness to the door, and kicked with all his strength: "Jack, Jack Rhett!" he called. "In the cellar!"

In a moment the door burst open, and Jim Reynolds stood with a lighted lantern in his hand.

"Well, son, we got here in time. Hurt, boy? No? Lucky fer them coyotes you ain't. You got some friend in that sheriff, an' he's like a r'arin' lion. Here, I'll cut them ropes. Now come along. Your friend Jack is some impatient."

WHEN Eggleston stumbled up the stairs in the semi-darkness and burst into the big bunk-room, disheveled, but grinning joyously, he saw his late bunk companions sitting about in various groups—a card game had been stopped suddenly; one puncher had a banjo across his knees; one had been mending a saddle; but all now sat with arms upraised, while a group of determined-looking, watchful men stood lined up just inside the door, guns out.

In front of them towered a giant figure, his big strong features tense, his eyes glittering alertly. A sweeping glance from the keen gray eyes caught sight of the prisoner—and a fleeting gleam of a smile broke through the stern lines of his face.

"All right, boy? Good! Your job now. Corral them guns. Begin on that mussed-up *hombre* in the bunk. He's tried twice to reach the gun-belt on that nail. Right. Pile 'em all here by the door. Sim, get into the kitchen an' cover that cook—don't like his looks. Riggs an' Reynolds, come with me. Here, boy—watch this bunch." And the big sheriff pressed a gun into Eggleston's hand. "We're aimin' to visit the boss—be back *pronto*. I got to take Reynolds—he knows the ropes—an' Sim in the kitchen will be in the rear."

And in another minute, the big room was deadly still; Eggleston, nerves strung taut, facing an unarmed but desperate roomful with a big revolver clutched in his nervous hand.

When the big sheriff, with his two deputies behind him, filled the doorway of Veeder's office, the rancher was deep in close talk with his latest visitor, and he was smiling, for he was playing a game he liked. He was "getting something" on the son of a powerful man; one who was physically in his power. For once, Bill Veeder was surprized when he glanced up and saw Jack Rhett, with the others behind him; yet, still smiling, he looked at the sheriff steadily.

"Well, what is it? And who are you?" he asked evenly.

"I want you, Veeder—and you know who I am," boomed the big voice.

Veeder tilted back in his chair and smiled more broadly.

"Want *me?* Oh, I reckon not. There's some mistake," he said, but his tone, as well as his look, was measured, watchful.

"Ain't no mistake, Bill. You been brandin' Eggleston's Lazy K stock an' sellin' 'em as Star an' Bar, through Lewis as a blind—an' you been runnin' in stock from Mex—usin' Eggleston's ranch as a clearin'-house fer your rustlin' operations. We got Thad Lewis, an' we——"

Bang! So quickly that the motion could hardly be followed Veeder's gun had come up, shattering the big lamp on the corner of his desk; and in the sudden darkness he sprang back, stepped swiftly through the open window to the porch, vaulted the railing and ran for the bunk-house. Rhett was behind him with only two men—and a dozen men, armed, were in the bunk-house, unaware of the sheriff's visit—so Veeder thought. They'd wipe out that interfering sheriff, and make their getaway. He had

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plenty—he'd like to wait for returns from this last big shipment of cattle, but——

"Boys!" he shouted, as he burst through the bunk-house door. "Get your guns and come with——"

But here he stopped.

He saw a crowd of sullen men, faced by one tall slender figure.

That figure swung about at the sound of his voice, gun up, and two gray eyes, blazing with excitement, bored into Veeder's. The rancher's gun, still hot, was in his hand, and when he sensed the scene before him, the long barrel tilted upward with a quick jerk, and the two guns roared together. Eggleston saw Veeder standing straight and still for a fleeting moment—then a surprized look came into the ranchman's keen eyes, the gun dropped from his hand and he slid quietly to the floor. Eggleston, pressing his hand to a splintered rib which lay close above his heart, faced a roomful, a little wavy spiral of smoke drifting off from the barrel of his gun.

"You all—just as you are!" he barked, backing against the wall and keeping his voice even with an effort. "Veeder got me, but I can still shoot."

His eyes were contracted with pain, and his lips compressed, when Rhett came bursting in a moment later.

"That coyote here? We missed him, an' heard those shots——"

Then he saw Veeder on the floor, lying very still, and his young friend leaning against the wall. Eggleston glanced beyond the sheriff to a ruddy light which played fitfully on the outer panels of the open door, and jumped for the opening, his wound forgotten:

"Jack, Jack!" he cried. "The ranch-house is afire—an' Stumpy in bed up-stairs with a busted leg!"

He started running toward the blazing building through the heavy sand. For a hundred yards he ran, buoyed up by a last flicker of strength, then he pitched forward on his face in the road. The sheriff, who followed, picked him up in his powerful arms, bore him back to the bunk-house and laid him gently in a bunk—then, leaving Riggs as guard over the punchers, he ran for the blazing house, while Jim Reynolds—the cowmen covered—and Rhett flying for the house—strolled purposefully around the corner of the bunk-house to the kitchen in the rear, and relieved Sim of his guard over Conway, the cook.

MANY hours later, Eggleston opened his eyes to look into Rhett's face, an agony of concern in the sheriff's eyes.

"Thank God, son, you're alive."

"Don't you worry—I'll be all right, old-timer. Where am I—in the bunk-house?"

Then he slipped again into unconsciousness.

He awoke again when the sun was high, with a sense of utter physical relaxation but with a mind preternaturally clear. Dr. Ellicott was there beside his bunk, grinning amiably:

"You're a tough boy to kill—I'll say that, sir. A little more activity on your part, and that splintered rib would have punctured your heart. You'll lie perfectly quiet, now, for a week—all nicely bound up with plaster—but if you'll promise not to move, you may talk. And you look as though you'd bust if you didn't."

"Doc—glad to see you. Where's Jack Rhett?"

"The sheriff? He's fuming to take his catch to the county seat, but he won't stir until he's sure you're O. K. He will probably go now, however," answered Ellicott.

"Doc, tell me what happened after my light went out?"

"Well, it's hearsay with me. The lamp that Veeder shot out spilled burning oil on a very expensive bearskin rug. You saw the result. Rhett brought Stumpy out himself in his gorilla arms. Said you'd started that job, so he was going to finish it for you. Rhett got his whiskers singed. Also got a young gentleman who was with Veeder when it all happened."

"Doc," said his patient excitedly, "where's that boy now?"

"The sheriff gave him your place in the cellar," grinned Ellicott; "chap swore he was Eggleston's son. Rhett swore he didn't act like any Eggleston he knew, and he plans to take him with the rest to the county seat."

"Doc, go tell Jack Rhett to come here." There was so much command, compelling will, in the young voice, that Ellicott jumped to obey.

Rhett came in, beaming.

"——! boy, I thought you was goin' to cash in, an' it pretty near done me up. What is it, sonny?"

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"Jack, I want you to let that young fellow up out of the cellar. Want to talk to him."

"Oh, is that all? Sure—but I'll stay by to watch, for you couldn't manage him, an' I don't trust that feller."

When the prisoner came from the darkness into the room brightly lighted by a briliant sun, he blinked. His arrogance was gone, and a hunted, worried look was on his face.

"Sit down, Hank," said the young man lying in the bunk. "Sheriff Rhett, this is Henry Eggleston junior. I've seen his picture—and anyway, he's his father's own son in looks. He isn't implicated with the bunch here, got here just before you did."

He turned to the other.

"Just why did you come, Hank? You nearly spoiled things. You see, I'm Henry Eggleston, too—distant relative, maybe. Anyway, I think a lot of your dad—worked confidentially for him on several matters. I promised him I'd come down here and stay till I'd found out what was the matter with his ranch."

"I've never seen you," said Hank.

The other Eggleston grinned.

"No—you wouldn't—you don't even see your dad much; he says he really doesn't know you—you're away from home all the time. But you haven't told me why you came," persisted Eggleston.

Hank colored furiously, looking like a guilty boy—and he was little more.

"If you don't mind, I'd rather not. It isn't anything I can't work out of, as I wrote dad from Kansas City, when I told him I was coming here."

The wounded man studied the embarrassed young fellow closely.

"Come here aiming to run straight and be a cow-punch?" he asked suddenly.

"You bet," said Hank fervently.

Harry Eggleston turned dark-rimmed but resolute eyes on the sheriff.

"Jack, old-timer, I'll answer for this chap—may I have him?"

"Have him if you want him, boy—I ain't lost him," growled Rhett.

Eggleston smiled—he knew that Rhett would have taken positive pleasure in putting that young man in jail, for he was aware of the sheriff's opinions regarding that particular variety of young man.

"Thanks, Jack. Will you ask Jim Reynolds to come here?"

When Reynolds entered, the man lying in the bunk grinned whimsically.

"Jim, you old wild cat, where is Conway?"

Reynolds' usually genial face turned hard. "I don't know, son, but knowin' him quite some while he was on this here earth, I got my opinion."

"I infer that you met again, and you beat him to the draw?" Eggleston's tone was matter of fact.

"You got it straight, boy," stated Reynolds grimly. "Sim was careless about fannin' him for a shoulder gun—an' he always allowed he was goin' to git me some day."

"Well, Jim, I've got a job for you. Foreman of Malapai—want it? You start with one cowboy."

Jim Reynolds' face lighted. "Sure—who's the cowboy?"

"Henry Eggleston's son there—I'm acting for his father. The bunk-house being cleaned, you got to rustle a new outfit *pronto*. Light out for Soda Flats, will you, Jim? And wire the facts to Henry Eggleston—then bring a bunch back with you."

He turned to Eggleston junior.

"You're hired, Hank, forty dollars per. Go with Jim and be a good and faithful cowpunch. Better get busy, for I expect your dad soon. He's sure been worrying about my hide since he got your letter, and if I'm not all off, that dad of yours packed his grip for Malapai soon as he got it—and stuffed in a gun just for luck."

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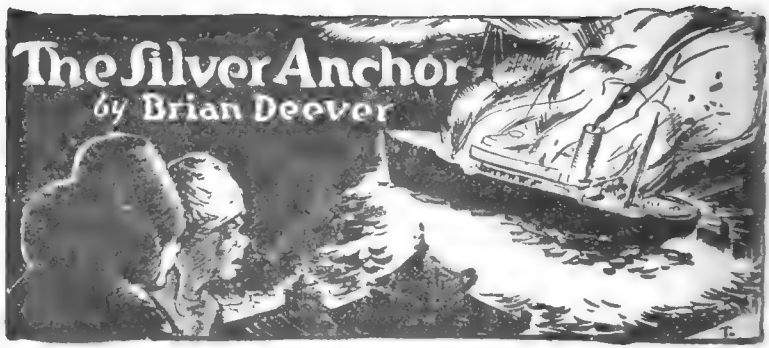

Author of "Fourteen and Lafferty."

THERE was a glare in the sky over the harbor just before the dawn of a Sunday in April. An old sea tramp, the *Cetura*, was burning at her moorings. Bright as the glare was, the whole city slept, and only the crew and two strangers witnessed the fire.

The two strangers were a certain Mongol porter and his crony, a Chinese droshky driver, who had risen early to catch the first of the day's trade and had been attracted by the blaze, which was near their humble lodgings in a deserted watchman's hut of the Chinese and Eastern Railway. The fact that they were there bears a definite relation to what happened afterward.

The fight to save the *Cetura* was lost. When her captain nodded to his second officer that all was over and the boatswain had piped all hands aft, and when it seemed to the second officer that every man had passed outboard down the gang, Vasya the porter and Li Hang the *ischvoschik*, his crony, were among the black figures grouped upon the dock.

The men donned their fur bonnets, fastened down their ear-flaps, tying them under the chin, stamped, swung their arms, lighted cigarets and talked loudly. Vasya and Li Hang, too, fastened their own fur turbans snugly in the cold north breeze that blew before the dawn and in their own singsong way talked to each other about rubles and rice, kopecks and queer happenings, putting in a remark about the fire here and there quite as loudly as the rest.

The captain came ashore.

"I'll see what I can do about lodging and meals," he said. "I'll see what I can do for today and tonight, until we can get paid and get a new ship and all."

There were comments of approval. Some young sailor called out, "Good o-old cap" impulsively, and an old one gently hushed him with an admonitory punch in the thick muscles of his brawny back—a punch administered from the rear without notice.

After the fire, lodging and food were the big issue; at least as far as the men were concerned. But the second officer, whose duty it was to count off the crew before they were dismissed, wasn't very much bothered about it. He had already been on leave in town, and he had got a place to stay on Polinskaya Street, one of the main thoroughfares of Vladivostok.

But despite his thoughts of vodka, a warm bed and sleep, he counted the black figures as they moved away. His captain turned and flung him a good-by and half-beckoned to him to join them—the sincerity that was missing from the gesture meant that the captain knew his second officer had made arrangements for himself in town—but none of the others turned.

He called their names to himself, not speaking them, but enunciating them with his lips, teeth and tongue—

"Hansen, Baldwin, Mulrooney, Wright, Mainroyal—funny name for a sailor, that—Mainroyal, Nelson, Daniels, Boh."

All there, or at least a figure for every man. In a moment they were gone into the darkness, and their shadows, long, waving,

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walking, shortened and were gone too. He felt satisfied. He let the pulsating, firing ideas of drink and rest and warmth come back into his mind.

The *Cetura* was resting on the bottom. The little waves on the surface of the Golden Horn lapped under her rail.

Bit by bit they laid up long rows of lace of greenish ice.

The crowd went up to town by the street that passes under the ancient Tatar arch. At Swetlanskaya Street Vasya the Mongol porter and Li Hang the Chinese droshky-man, unnoticed, unmissed, turned into an alley.

While the crunch of the feet on the snow was but dying away and the sea-water slowly, determinedly, was slithering into the hull of the old *Cetura* through expanded seams and flowing in gurglingly through the wide mouths made by fire, seeking its own level, Mainroyal the sailor and his pal Mulrooney, contrary to the convictions of the second officer, were still working below alone, pounding and splintering away at a bulkhead that reeked of heat and blistered before their eyes.

The smoke in the passage was getting thick. It set Mulrooney coughing, choking, strangling. It was unendurable. His head swam. He dropped his ax and flung himself, his head in his arms, against the bulkhead. Its heat reached him suddenly through his sleeves, with the familiar shock of leaning against a steam-pipe.

He started. It was fearfully hot. He heard flames crackling. The smoke came anew in a wrestling cloud as if it were alive. Gasping agonizingly, he ran for the ladder.

As he ran his feet splashed through six inches of water that swam at him in a little wave and grew immediately deeper. The lights went out. Fighting for breath and aware that any second he might collapse, smothered by the thick, burning, biting gas he breathed, Mainroyal made after him in the dark, caught him in his arms and groped for the ladder chains. Up they went.

The deck was empty. There was not a soul on the dock. A maze of footprints led away toward the street, then ran up the hillside and went under the old arch.

"Curse this now," choked Mulrooney sadly, his relief at getting out of the smoke having quickly changed into gloom at the uncertainty of his situation. "They've gone and left us now."

He looked about him hopelessly, and, seeing nothing but unpleasant things, stared up at Mainroyal—who was a much taller man—narrowing his eyes, drawing down the corners of his big, firm-lipped mouth. The nostrils of his little Irish nose widened. He was silent.

Mainroyal read his face. It was an empty, helpless stare. It meant one thing: Mike Mulrooney was broke; and when Mike was in that condition, it meant he had nothing tangible in the world but himself and his clothes. To get the necessities of life for him would be the concern of his pal for the present.

All right. Mainroyal thought cheerfully of his own money-belt. Then he remembered it was below, where he could not get it. He looked down at his icy boots. That was one way of avoiding Mulrooney's eyes. He stamped to crack off the excess ice. He turned up the collar of his pea-jacket and fastened down under his chin the flaps of his fur bonnet. This all took seconds of time that could be used for racing thought.

Strangely, in these things, as he usually did, Mike Mulrooney imitated him; stamped in the same way, went through the same gestures; turned up his collar, fastened his ear-flaps—all without self-consciousness, innocently, as a child would do.

Mainroyal wore heavy mittens; expensive things lined with soft fur, as regal as if they had once been part of the apparel of a prince. As long as he had been going to sea—and none knew just how long that was, or how and why he had chosen to go, all things dating from the war—he had managed somehow, despite the rough work he had to do, to take care of his hands. No broken thumbs or amputations for him!

Once Mulrooney, in imitation of his habitual associate, had begun to take particular pains with the misshapen red fists and hams of hands *he* had—washed them with surgeon's soap, oiled them with camphor preparations—and the queer smile of Mainroyal that Mulrooney could not understand had driven him to give it up.

For a moment the two stood on the dock undecided.

Far out over the Bay of Peter the Great a new light, that of the dawn, was rising. The glimmering arc lights on the looming hills were fainter now, and the outlines of the rough frame houses were more distinct.

"What are we goin' to do-o?" asked

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Mulrooney, twisting his neck and looking up at Mainroyal half-complainingly.

"Up to town—and——"

"We eat?"

There was smothered doubt in Mainroyal's face as he looked back at his friend and said—

"Yes, by the skull of Abraham and one of his wives—Cetura—though the two of us are broke."

Mulrooney's eyes grew hard, and he squinted. This was because he was thinking. From then on he kept squinting, and the hard look stayed in his eyes, and he watched every move Mainroyal made and hung on to his very word.

THE dawn came quickly.

It took the two men a long time to find their way up to the main streets through the dirty, narrow, refuse-littered by-streets that lead up the hillside from the quay. While they walked the sun grew hot, and the glaze of night-ice on the unpaved streets melted and left mud. A while ago the arc lights on "the hump" had gone out suddenly, leaving only the gray of morning. Now they could look back and see the masts of strange shipping in the Horn.

Here were the big stacks of the Japanese steamer, there the gray hulks and bristling guns of three men-of-war—a Jap, H. M. S. *Kent* and the U. S. S. *Brooklyn*—and beyond, a forest of reed-like masts where the Korean fishermen were tied.

The orange-colored light of the big yellow sun burned oblong sails until they shone scarlet, and their ribs were black in silhouette. The heavy smoke of a soft-coal-burning locomotive rolled up and trailed on as a train of small freight cars began to pull out to begin its long, dangerous journey to Harbin or Chita or some stranger place. They could hear the long-drawn, plaintive note of the gateman's trumpet, warning passengers through the streets.

Far over to the right, high up on a yoke of hills, there glinted the cathedral spires in the sunlight. The peaceful music of distant bells, sounding with touching sweetness as only Siberian bells seem to ring, came to them, bringing consolation and religious thoughts.

They turned into the noise and flash and motion of Swetlanskaya Street. It was filled with the morning crowds. They walked along in their homely pea-jackets and icy boots among all the races of the earth in their proud costumes. Brown eyes of peasant girls in jade and turquoise and scarlet and yellow peered at them in passing. These were followed usually by fat, shapeless matrons, peerless chaperons.

They elbowed white-bearded Korean fathers from the outlying fishing-villages to get through and likened the white Korean robes to those which Westerners are wont to believe the Christian martyrs wore. Dirty Mongol laborers in packs like animals went by, heads down, walking with that jogging, dog-like pace that is one of their most marked characteristics.

Russian priests in long plush cassocks, Buriat princes from the interior who affected sleeves at least a foot too long for them, Italian *caribinieri* in cloaks and three-cornered hats reminiscent of the old Continentals; Indo-Chinamen, Annamites and all the other personalities of the Vladivostok streets moved along with Mainroyal and Mulrooney and milled around them. Weariness and hunger looked at them from many a pair of passing eyes, reminding them of their own plight.

Here were barred bank buildings, forlorn and dismal-looking, stored with the wherewithal to buy a nation meals, to house a people for a night. There was a row of slop-shops with a small Japanese *torgloba* jammed in among them. The cathedral, which they had seen far in the distance on the yoke of hills, its bulbous domes alight in the sunrise, was near by now. Mainroyal seemed to be using it for a landmark.

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Suddenly they cut off Swetlanskaya Street and went a little farther up the hill. Mainroyal stopped under a wooden sign swinging in the breeze. Mulrooney followed Mainroyal's glance and read thereon in English, "The Silver Anchor."

They gazed through the windows. Inside men and women—the more prosperous members of the morning crowds—were sitting at white-covered tables, eating, drinking and smoking; laughing and chatting among themselves in the orthodox manner.

Mainroyal took off his mittens and breathed upon his hands.

"It's cold—cold," he said. "If I could only get my hands warm!"

He put on his mits again and dug his hand deep into the breast pockets of his pea-coat. Then he made for the door. Mulrooney caught him by the arm.

"What're ye goin' to do, now? Rough stuff?"

Mainroyal laughed at him.

"No. Well, maybe it *is* rough stuff."

He laughed again, a little bitterly this time.

"Well, wait—not here. They're all—" meaning the diners— "up-and-uppers now; can't ye see?" he protested.

The place had been one of the haunts of the old nobility. But there was no one here now who would know nobility. The mighty had become the lowly—princesses, dancers; dukes, coachmen in the rush to obtain the merest livelihood after the great catastrophe. And the consequent leveling of the classes had raised the station of the peasants and the artizans, so that the Silver Anchor still was the rendezvous of moneyed patrons, whose contentment and racial appreciativeness brought them there.

Mainroyal stood by his choice.

"Yes. It's got to be here. This is the kind of a place for us. Come on."

Mike Mulrooney could not imagine what was going to happen. His squinting, consequent with his prodigous efforts at thinking deeply, was making his none-too-handsome face most remarkably ugly. He came along, however, feeling a gnawing about his belt and too a warm faith in whatever this sailor called Mainroyal would do.

The interior of the restaurant stretched back to a glazed porch that overlooked the Horn. Its atmosphere was one of sadness, fear, apprehension, instability; the breath of the Far Eastern Republic. The many little things that such a place should have, it seemed—would have to have today to make it a success—were missing.

The waiter served the coffee in the customary Russian manner—the coffee sirup in a little china pot, the hot water separate, and two long, tinted glasses with long spoons. The sugar was measured out with the utmost care on to two tiny porcelain saucers.

Mulrooney had never seen this ceremony before. It seemed to interest him greatly. Still, *he* had nothing to worry about; or at least the contingency that would bring about a call upon him for assistance had not yet come.

Mainroyal moistened a napkin in the steam of the samovar and warmed his hands. He lit a cigaret. When it was half-smoked be blocked it on a tray. He pushed back his chair.

So quietly, so quickly that he was almost unobserved, he made for the end of the room, where there was a platform in the windows.

Mulrooney was half-out of his seat in open-mouthed surprize to see a red-necked shipmate of his do a thing like that. But he subsided with a little grin of relief when he saw that it was with a masterly familiarity, a kind of glorious craftsmanship, that the man who called himself Mainroyal opened the mahogany case of the piano there and slid his fingers ripplingly, caressingly, along the ivory keys. He looked down at Mulrooney, but instead of having the look of confidence and anticipation Mike had hoped to see, the face had gone white and showed displeasure. Mulrooney wondered.

A waitress, ready with the spontaneous friendship of Russia for the followers of an art, smiled amusedly. After a moment of merry consideration she went over and pushed open one of the windows near him slightly, so that the fresh morning air of the streets came in to him, mixed as it was with the unclean and tangy odor of Asia and the hum and melody and the discord of the crowds. She met his eyes and said in a low voice—

"*Nitchevo, karosha—nitchevo.*"

This is the equivalent of the English—

"It's all right, you know—go to it."

He struck a bass chord and shuddered at the result.

The moment in which he sat there, stroking his hands, his head bent as if he were

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thinking deeply, was a long one for him and for Mulrooney. Some one at a near-by table, in a loud, jeering voice began to circulate the knowledge that the piano was out of tune. There were a few moderate laughs of derision and much chattering.

Mulrooney bit his lower lip and drew in his breath with a hiss. His lumpy biceps swelled. He wanted fervently to pitch in somehow and help his friend out of this pinch. The muscles of his back writhed, and his under jaw thrust itself out. He was getting hotter and hotter as the moment lengthened. If there should be physical violence—the little matter of being ejected, for instance—Mike Mulrooney would be there doling out right hooks and left jabs and grand slams, for he was aching for the fray.

The sailor at the piano, whose athletic build somehow took on a slimness and a grace as he sat there, was not thinking of physical combat. His contest was mental. He was groping for the maddest, the most hopeless thing that would enable him to tune this piano in less time than such an instrument had ever been tuned before. He found it.

With the soft pedal clamped hard down, he ran his two hands from one end to the other of the little black and white steps. Here and there in a dozen places came the discord. Mulrooney saw red spots appear on Mainroyal's cheekbones. Mainroyal's eyes snapped as he moved.

He raised the big wooden triangle of a cover. Then, beating a changing tremolo with his left hand, twisting the pins by the sheer marble strength of the fingers of his right hand, in five minutes he had the piano tuned.

The magic of the sailor's hands was admirable. Mulrooney saw the proprietor smiling patronizingly in the doorway. He whistled softly to himself. Now for it, he thought.

The sailor played the first line of the Russian national hymn. Its heavy beauty, so filled with the powerful enthusiasms that sway a race of millions today in the same strange manner they did generations ago despite war, revolutions, suffering and death, stood the patrons on their feet as one man.

He adjusted the rhythm to an old song of the peasantry. He stopped. The tinkling of forks, spoons in glasses, and the clatter of knives on plates had ceased. So had every voice.

In the silence suddenly, clearly, from the street above came the boyish voice of a young officer shouting a military command, then the brazen bray of a bugle. Mainroyal's face lighted. He seemed to have caught it, if no on one else did. He began again, a song of horses—more than a song; a thing of crashing immenseness and fast-stepping intricacies, the creation of a great master dreaming of horses, of beautiful creatures astride the horses of heaven, bearing away to unending happiness the souls of dead warriors. He glorified all horsemen, all cavalrymen, as a Cossack troop cantered by, and he followed it out of earshot with a crafty diminuendo, slowing down, quieting down to just a tinkle.

He waited. Then with notes ascending in restless, impatient pairs through the treble he made a young actor chased by a pitiless spotlight stagger across a stage, stagger heart-breakingly in his school-boy drunkenness that was the tragedy of his pretty, painted mimicry.

Then he played of the ocean. From his place in the window he could see the stacks and masts of the shipping in the Golden Horn. Majesty. Solemnity. Divinity. He made swells of tremendous power rise and fall ponderously; animate yet dead; breaking all the laws of the universe to obey one. Softly again.

He turned to the guests. A breath of later April came to him through the open window. He saw a sad-eyed peasant girl. She had a mayflower in her hair. He played a song of the Spring, of tenderness and patience, of hope. A long silence preceded the applause.

When at last he rose the proprietor came to him. Mainroyal walked with him to Mulrooney's side, a strange concert-stage musician in boots and pea-jacket, his face hard-and tanned, the back of his neck sunburned.

Mike Mulrooney was beaming. Already the glamour of his bunkie's skill had seeped into the veins of the Irishman. But he said nothing. He knew silence about himself was what his shipmate wanted above all things.

The audience was buzzing with the name that sounded not at all like the name of a sail, and lowly nobles, peasants, tradesman and artizans of the Republic of the Far East

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were stealing scrutinizing glances at the two sailors in their rough clothes, with undisguised admiration in their eyes for the sailor-pianist.

Later when there was but one fried herring left on the plate of Mike Mulrooney—this one the sole survivor of a goodly number—Mainroyal himself broke the silence.

Outside, Mulrooney declared he knew now why Mainroyal was always so careful with his hands and grinned and spat into the gutter:

"You're a musician, ain't ye now?" he asked.

"No, Mike; I'm a sailor, and your pal, I hope," was the answer.

"You're both of thim things," said Mike.

They went their way arm in arm, comfortable, happy, contented.

HOURS later the second officer of the *Cetura*—still unknowing that he had counted one Vasya, a Mongol porter, and Li Hang, a certain Chinese droshkyman, for two infinitely more valuable able seamen—put down a copy of the *Russky Golos*, having exhausted the columns of English news printed therein, and gazed out of his window on to Polinskaya Street.

There he saw Mainroyal and Mulrooney tramping along, looking sleek and happy. Now the second officer was lonesome, and he wanted the companionship of his kind badly.

He thrust the window open, put his head out and called—

"O-o-o-h, Mike Mulrooney!"

Mulrooney turned.

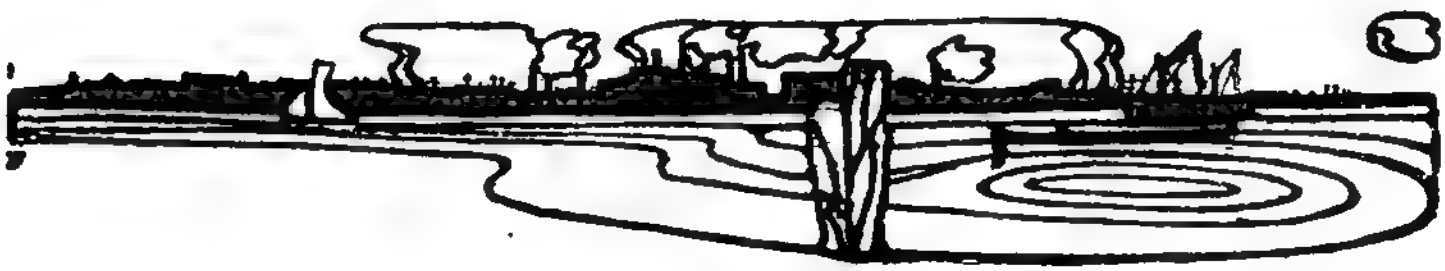
"Oh, prince! Hey, your Majesty!"

"Mainroyal"—sailor, prince, scion of three centuries of noblemen, wearer of a coarse pea-jacket instead of a regal robe, a button of the Seamen's Union instead of the Cross of St. Vladimir—laughed and waved and put his forefinger on his lips in an admonitory way. He turned too, and the two of them, striding along in step as if they were walking the fo'csle deck, headed back.

After that the *Cetura* lay for a long while on the bottom of the Golden Horn, burned and unsalvaged—for a time so long that men began to forget; and even Li Hang the cab-driver and his crony Vasya the Mongol, smoking opium in the musky air of a vodka den at the end of an alley, talked of it no more. And the nobleman forgot his orders and his medals and his proud uniform of an officer in a Cossack regiment of the Czar, eating the lotus of companionship with strong men whom he thought to be better than himself. They made him happy, having welcomed him as one of them.

"Wad ye be thinkin' now that a felly could be givin' music for a meal?" begins Mike Mulrooney's best yarn.

And somewhere near Mike there is always a man with white hands and a red neck who is ready to prove that or anything else Mike says, right or wrong.



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Author of "An Agent of Providence" "Sawdust Johnny's Liquor Cure," etc.

"INJUNS queer people to figger? No, sir. The Injun's plain and straightforward. If he goes crooked he's crooked all the way; if he gits drunk he's pie-eyed; if he makes war he makes it plumb ferocious; if he's peaceful he's so durned quiet that his crops goes to ruin for lack of pickin'.

"Yes, sir; the Injun,—the old-fashioned Injun and not these here college-trained shoe clerks—was plumb unanimous. If he was your enemy he hated you clear to his toe-nails; if he was your friend he'd *be* your friend.

"I had a friend like that once; an Injun; I had to shoot him, but I'm still wonderin' if it wasn't unfortunate, all around!"

Old John Wilson — "Lightning-Draw Jack" they used to call him in the wild old frontier days—tilted his chair against the sun-cracked boards of his residence and thoughtfully returned the smoking stem of his corn-cob back under the gray longhorn mustache.

The residence overlooked the sheer chalk-white cliffs of Antelope "Crick," just below us. Beyond the creek lay the great sage-brush plain extending to hazy-blue mountains in the far distance. The slant-roofed shanty—1877 model, decorated with skins nicely-salted and hanging from board to board—hid a view of the modernized town a mile behind us.

"This here Injun," continued old Jack thoughtfully, "got hit with my forty-five-seventy rifle, and he ain't with us any more."

"Start at the start," I suggested.

"Well," opined old Jack, "if you've got to hear the worst, here goes:

I MET him in the crick one day when the freshets up in the mountains made 'er ride high and wild, bitin' a few acres off the banks and otherwise ramblin' promiscuous over the landscape. I was ridin' along the bluffs on my way to town and noticed a red blanket and a lot of yells a-sailin' down the muddy torrent and tryin' to clutch bits of sage and kindlin'-wood as they went past him.

One quick glance showed that this was only an Injun, so I rode onward, not havin' any time for trifles. That there attitude of mine seems sort of cruel, but in them days there wasn't a man in the whole town who'd lift a finger if every Injun in the nation was drownin'. Geronimo had just murdered a few ranchers and feelin' was agin' 'em.

But after a while it dawned on me that this here Injun was takin' a bath, so I reined in and watched this here festive occasion.

I rode along the edge of the bluffs and kept pace as he tore along, rollin' over and over and gradually shuckin' parts of his clothes which came to the surface and wabbled past him on the water—a shirt here, a red blanket there, a pair o' pants over yonder, and so on.

After a while he began to sink, and his arms went up out of the water.

I'm a kind-hearted critter, and so by this time I was torn between my civic duty and

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my pity for a dumb animal in trouble, him lookin' so drenched and lonely and soggy and harmless that I figgered it was almost safe to pull him in. Of course he might recover and join Geronimo and massacree the town and scalp all the women and burn all the houses, but I couldn't help it. I figgered I had to give that there Injun a sportin' chance.

I uncoiled my riata and slung 'er down, wagglin' the thing in the waters till he connected. He had sense enough to run his arm thrqugh the loop and then I towed him, lookin' for a place to land him. The bluffs were too steep and the water was runnin' like a mill-race.

I towed that there Injun half a mile. Once or twice I tried to yank him up over the bluffs but the rope couldn't stand the strain, so I chucked him back in the crick and hauled him along till we reached a pebbly sand-bar, where I fished him out of the water, over a couple logs and a few acres of brush, and stomped on him considerable to get the water out of him.

Bimeby he came back to life. He shook the water off his glistening red hide and stared at me violent for a time till he saw how I'd saved his life, and then his face glowed with gratitude. You could see the expression change—first pizen-hatred, then torture and bonfires, then plain murder, then mayhem, and finally a soft assault-and-battery look. He staggered to his feet and held out a hand.

He stood like one of these here glistenin' copper statues with ripplin' muscles like you see in an art gallery—perfect! Big, broad, powerful and sort of stately aside from his face, which was all jaw and colored like dark leather. He turned his wildcat eyes toward mine.

"Wrugh!" he barked, in thanks.

I shook hands and brought him up to the house and gave him an old pair of pants. He grunted more thanks and loped off.

Jed Spry caught me in the Golden Era Saloon next day and got gay about it.

"I understand you're one of these here Injun lovers!" Spry says sarcastic, grinnin' through his black beard.

"What about it?" I asks, hitchin' my six-shooter belt forward.

"Nothin' much," says Jed, "but that's Hoja."

"Hoja?"

"Yes. That's the slick Apache that one o' them missionaries started to educate ten years ago. The missionary learned him to read, write and cipher, and then this here grateful redskin burned his shanty and sold his hosses in the next county, just because the missionary licked him with a strap! Huh! If he hangs around here, I'll lick him! I'll send him a shower of forty-five slugs!"

"You let him alone!" I orders.

I was town marshal then and sworn to keep the peace; but Jed looked sore.

"Huh!" he says. "Injuns ain't popular around here just now!"

A passel of 'Paches had just biled down over the hills and raised considerable ructions. The town was on edge; but the law was the law.

"Peaceful folks will be protected!" I roars, stubborn. "If that there Injun acts peaceful here—or anybody else—he's entitled to protection!"

The crowd at the bar looks thoughtful at their glasses and the poker-chips in the back room quits rattlin'; but there's no loud remarks. My temper's up, and I'm hostile.

I went down the line of saloons and slung this here declaration far and wide, bein' greeted by silent hoots and jeers. When I made my talk in the Gem Saloon and Dance Hall, Mike Clampett, the two-gun man, leans against the bar and gives me a mean sneer.

"If any Injun comes near my boot," he promises, "I'll kick him clear through that blacksmith shop, over yonder!"

I looks him in the eye.

"If you want to practise any kickin'," I returns coldly, "do it now!"

Mike gives me a sour look, but the odds are too even between us—both of us can draw like a flash—and he turns his head away and keeps his hands on the bar.

"If you was an Injun," he says, very polite, "I would!"

There was nothin' to reply to that so I says "Ha-ha" cuttingly and turns away cautious, Mike bein' unreliable behind your back.

WHEN I came back to the house, boilin' with honest rage at the whole darned town, who should be campin' on my door-step but this here murder-faced Injun. He was settin' on that hard ground just alongside the door, wrapped in a shriekin' red blanket full of zig-zag designs which he'd probably stolen from

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some Navaho. He blocked the doorway when I started inside.

"You my friend!" he grunts.

"Yes," I snarls. "What about it?"

"I you friend," he comes back.

"What of it?" I rasps.

"You resign," he suggests.

"Resign what?" says I.

"You resign," he repeats. "Leggo star. They got too many guns."

I stares at him like he's gone crazy. Here I am, tryin' to protect this here locoed-idiot in a red blanket, and now he's aimin' to make me turn in my star which demands law and order in the community!"

"Resign?" I shouts. "Then where would you be?"

"Bad men comin'," he informs me, wrappin' the blanket around his face like a fortune-teller.

"They're here already!" I snorts. "Plenty!"

But this here Injun belonged to some grape-vine news-service that tells what happens almost before it happens. He was a sort of lone-wolf Injun who'd strayed away from his rampin' tribe, but he still kept up his subscription to the Injun *Gazette* and he got his bulletins fresh over the sage-brush every few hours. Don't ask me how they did it. They just did it. This here lone redskin friend of mine unloaded a whole charge of bad news straight at me.

Sand City, sixty miles over yonder ridge, had a clean-up campaign. They chased twelve undesirables out of their midst and sent the varmints our way—gunmen, bandits, crooked gamblers and hoss thieves. The toughest citizens from here to the Colorado was to enjoy our hospitality.

I oiled both my six-shooters and started for town, organizin' for war. Sure enough, this here delegation of tough *hombres* comes lopin' in just after sunset, yippin' and hootin' in welcome to themselves as they struck the edge of Main Street.

I stood at the end of the street with a shotgun, two six-shooters and seven deputies, sworn to defend the fair honor and gamblin' privileges of our city to the full extent of their ammunition. The visitors were surprized at this here preparedness. They yanked their hosses back on their haunches and milled around considerable; and then they started to argue about how they had a right to come in, this bein' a free country.

I told 'em if they really wanted to come in we could put 'em up in the calaboose or mebbe we could set 'em up to some nice new hemp and a cottonwood-limb; but they said they didn't want to bother us so much, preferrin' to bulge through town on their own hook.

After a few dozen shots we ran 'em back into the brush and then the whole town came forth from under the tables and chased 'em through this here moonlit plain till we'd started 'em back toward Sand City.

I rode back to town like a hero at the head of fifty-sixty riders. I begun to look on this here Injun friend of mine as a public asset. I aimed to keep him around for a sort of weather bureau to prophesy what was goin' to happen next, feedin' him every so often and lettin' him ramble around the brush without hobbles so's to get the latest bulletins from the seat of war, wherever it happened to be.

Jed Spry agreed that this was a good bet.

"I misjudged that there Injun," admits Jed. "We need him for a watch-dog. The only thing I'm afraid of is 'Paches. If a gang of 'Paches comes a-raidin' down the valley, will he tell on 'em? His own people? No, sir!"

"He'd tell me!" I replies.

"I ain't so sure," says Jed.

"Jed," says I, serious, "I know Injuns. This here Injun owes his life to me. He's elected himself my friend. There's no halfway friendship with an Injun. If the 'Paches started to come, he'd give me a private tip beforehand even if he let the rest of the town burn down. That there Injun's my *friend!*"

The Injun started to prove it after I got back from town that night. There'd been considerable of a celebration and I wabbled through the sage-brush, hatless in the moonlight, wonderin' which one of seven shanties was mine. This here Injun appeared out of nowhere and hauled me tenderly by the arm till the seven shanties merged into one and behaved themselves; after which he tossed me on my bed and chucked a blanket over me and my songs.

Next mornin' he was campin' cross-legged in front of the door.

"You my friend," he announces.

"Sure," I agrees. "What's the trouble now?"

"You resign," he urges.

"What?" says I. "You're at it again?"

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"You resign!" he repeats. "Too much bad-man. Too much guns. They shoot you."

"Why, you dog-goned lunatic, I'm ridin' on the crest of popularity!" I yells. "The town's behind me to a man!"

"They lie!" he growls.

"Aw, shut up!" says I, disgusted.

He changes the subject.

"Whisky?" he insinuates.

"No," says I.

"You my friend," he reminds me.

"Sure," says I. "I'm goin' to guard your morals. No whisky!"

He scowls and fades into the brush. I tidies up the shanty and makes for town.

Along toward dusk I'd made the rounds of Main Street two-three times and found all quiet. I got back to the Gem Dance Hall and was just mountin' the steps when there came a terrible screech and this here Injun friend of mine comes sailin' out of the door, bouncin' off the steps and crashin' to earth with a loud thud.

In two leaps I was up the steps and dashin' through the door. The crowd in the dance-hall parted. Suddenly two shots rang out in the still night air—*bang, bang!*

The first bullet creased the side of my head and knocked me cold. The second caught me in the right leg before I'd had time to drop.

I woke up in my shanty. A committee of kindhearted townsmen had patched me together with bandages.

"Who got me?" I demands, the instant I woke up.

Jed Spry sticks his ugly, bearded face in front of me.

"That was Mike Clampett," informs Jed. "He kicked that there Injun out of the place and then he seen you comin'. He shot in self-defense, you might say."

"Self-defense?" I yells. "I guess so! He's in for a lot o' self-defense from now on! What did he mean, floutin' the law that way? Didn't I tell him to let that Injun alone?"

"Mike's impulsive," explained Jed. "The Injun was presumin' on your friendship and was startin' to beg drinks along the line of saloons. Mike didn't like it."

I called my Injun friend inside. He was camped near the door way, wrapped in his red blanket. When he came inside his face was like a thunder-cloud. His brown fists were clenched.

"I kill'm!" he snarls, tremblin' with rage.

"Kill who?" I asks.

"Kill Clampett!" he promises, twistin' his fingers. "He kick me. He shoot you. I kill'm!"

"You keep away from Clampett!" I yells. "Do you want to commit suicide?"

This here Injun draws himself up to his full six feet. He looks plumb dignified and stately. He folds his hands and throws his hairy head back like one of these here Injun heroes you see in the art galleries—"Ticonderoga Defyin' his Enemies, or the Challenge of Kalamazoo," or some such truck as that.

"I fight!" he insists. "Knife, gun, six-shooter—all right. I die—all right!"

I sits up in spite of the pain.

"You dog-goned wooden-headed pie-faced idiot!" I yells. "Don't you know the cards are stacked against you? You're an Injun, ain't you? You're an Apache, ain't you? What'll happen when folks see an Injun with a gun or a knife in his hand? Why, you wild-eyed lunatic, you'd never reach Clampett! Folks will shoot first and ask questions afterward. That there town's *nervous!*"

"Town knows me now," he argues.

"Yeh," I agrees, "but if the town sees you fightin' a white, then what? There'll be about sixty folks around Clampett and each one has a six-shooter. Get a pencil and figger your chances!"

This here solemn Injun took me serious. He digs out some paper and starts cipherin' and in less than half an hour he's got the total. Sixty times six.

"Too much bullets!" he agrees, scowlin'.

"Then behave yourself!" I warns him. "If any one shoots Mike Clampett it's goin' to be me!"

The Injun flashed me a sour look and then he glided outside and camped down alongside my window and set down and started to think. I could see his red blanket beyond my window-sill. He never moved for five hours. He just set and studied.

Bimeby he disappeared. He came back two days later and camped down outside my window again.

NEXT day there was considerable poppin' over in town and Jed Spry came in with news.

"They had a battle," he allows. "Joe Williams shot Tom Camp and then Bill Rogers shot Joe Williams. They're all good shots. No recoveries."

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"Tom Camp!" I yells. "One of my best friends! What was this here battle about."

"I dunno," says Jed. "Joe comes into the saloon and says, 'Now, you sneakin' skunk, I've got yuh;' and then the shootin' began!"

I felt sick about this here incident for many an hour; but next day the town explodes again. Jed brings the good news:

"Charlie West got shot in the back by Ned Stern, the gambler. The Gem Saloon fights Ned to a man for this here cowardly deed and riddles him!"

I'm turnin' this over in my mind for several hours when the town explodes again. Next mornin' Jed brings in another sheaf of news. This time the casualty list numbers six.

"What's it all about?" I demands.

"I dunno," says Jed, "but the town's gittin' sort o' warm, I'll admit. There's a feelin' in the air, if you know what I mean."

"There'll be bullets in the air if I git loose!" I promises.

"We don't need you," says Jed. "We've got enough now!"

I laid back in my cot that night, with my head propped up, and watched the town. For hours she lay in the moonlight, still and silent except for the usual jangle of bum music and the lights from the dance-hall windows; and then—whoop!—she bursts into a roar of firearms. I could see the flashes along Main Street from my window.

Next mornin' Jed brings in the score:

"Two dead and three wounded," says Jed. "The funerals include Bat Martin, the gunman—"

"Good!" says I.

"And Jimmy Dale," concludes Jed.

I'm hit between the eyes.

"One of my best friends!" I moans. "Dog-gone it, I've got to take a hand in this!"

"You stay here!" horns in my Injun friend.

"You shut up!" I snaps. "What's in your hand?"

The Injun turns away. I grabs his blanket. He loosens his hand and shows me the edge of a cheap tablet of ruled paper and a pencil. I didn't think anything of it.

I was helped on a hoss and limped to town. The town was like a deserted village. The saloon porches were empty. Some one came around the corner of a little alley, but he ducked back the instant he saw somebody movin' on the street. I mounted the steps of the Gem Saloon and walked inside. The owner ducked behind the bar and grabbed a gun. Then he saw I was only a cripple, so he let me live.

"What's the matter here?" I asks.

"I dunno," he trembles, "but everybody's started shootin' everybody else!"

"What about?" I demands.

"I dunno," he says, "only, there's a lot of talebearin' goin' on. Every man's been warned against his neighbors. Everybody's skeered. This here town's loaded with malice, suspicion and hatred!"

I proved it. I hobbled all over town and folks acted cagey till I'd shown I wasn't hostile.

"Bull" Logan, the gunman, was campin' in a private corner of the Empire Saloon, bein' barricaded behind tables and chairs. Alongside him was a rifle, two six-shooters and a basket of lunch. He'd got cornered in there at night and he wasn't aimin' to go out just yet.

"What's the idea?" I demands. "Can't you stand in the open like a man?"

"And get shot in the back?" he snorts. "No, sir!"

"Who's goin' to shoot you?" I inquires.

"I dunno," he says. "I've got a message that mentions Mike Clampett; but folks are gettin' so restless that 'most anybody will try it the minute I sticks my head out!"

"What message?" I asks.

He pulls out a crumpled note printed with pencil on cheap ruled paper. It says:

> Beware of Mike Clampett. He shoot you in the back. He kill you on sight. A friend.

My heart froze in my bosom. I put two and two together. This here Injun of mine had been spreadin' anonymous notes all over town—sowin' hatred and confusion! And I was harborin' this snake—harborin' the viper that was startin' to kill off our whole community! My blood ran cold!

Just to make sure I prowled through town again, collectin' billy-does. Sure enough, every one of our worst citizens had warnin's. Everybody was suspicious. Everybody was warned about his enemy. Of course, the minute they met, the guns were out. Nobody took chances. Everybody was shootin' on sight!

"Holy smoke!" I wails to myself. "And

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I'm the one that's brought this here catastrophe!"

With murder in my heart I flogs my hoss back to the house. My Injun is settin' under my window. I leaps off my hoss and rages over to him, jumpin' on one foot.

"You low-down, treacherous, sneakin', murderin', yellow-livered reptile!" I screams. "You double-dealin', lyin', snake-in-the-grass, kneel down and say your prayers! I'm goin' to blow that ugly face of yours clear through that wall!"

He looks at me surprized.

"You sick," he observes. "What's matter?"

"This!" I sneers, unfoldin' a written threat in front of his eyes. "I suppose you didn't write this, hey? I suppose you didn't slip this under Bull Logan's door the other night when he wasn't lookin'?"

"Sure," says this Injun, dignified. "I write'm."

I was stumped, but I produces more evidence:

"How about this warnin' to Joe Wells?" I demands.

"I write'm all," admits this here Injun.

I yanks out my six-shooter.

"Explain!" I demands, cold and harsh. "You've only got a few minutes to live!"

The Injun threw me a surprized look again.

"I write'm," he explains. "You sick. No can kill Mike Clampett. I Injun. No can kill'm. All right. I get other men kill'm. I write letters. Sure I make'm shoot. Bimeby they kill Clampett!"

"What?" I shrieks, wild-eyed. "You set the whole town crazy with hatred, just to get one man?"

"Bimeby kill'm," insists this here calm Injun.

I was plumb flabbergasted. I could only stand and glare at him.

"But if you were after Clampett so much," I yells, "why did you start these other fellers to shootin' each other?"

"Town tough," observes this Injun. "Too much tough. Too much bad-men. You Town Marshal. Some day they shoot you. I kill bad-men now. Bimeby they no shoot you. You safe. All right. I help you. I your *friend!*"

I was plumb paralyzed.

In order to protect the Town Marshal, this here murder-minded idiot was wipin' out the town! Talk about your Apache raids! This here 'Pache was worse'n all the raids put together!

I found voice at last. I was tremblin' all over.

"I can't kill you cold-blooded," says I, solemn. "Not after that, but you git off this here mesa and if I ever see you again I'll shoot daylight through you! Now git!"

The Injun stuck out his hand.

"We friend!" he pleads.

"Friend, nothin'!" I yells. "You low-down, murderin', schemin' coyote, you've killed most of the friends I have! Git! *Pronto!*"

The Injun still held his hand out. I slapped it down. The Injun, with a sour look, heaved his red blanket up over his head and started for the crick.

Just then I heard a yell behind me. It was Jed.

"Mike Clampett's killed!" yells Jed. "Hooraw! Them gunmen are about all gone now! The town's purified! Let's celebrate!"

"LIGHTNING" Jack yawned and refilled his corn-cob pipe lazily. He was finished; but the story seemed incomplete.

"What happened to your Indian?" I asked.

"Him? Oh, shucks. He went back to his tribe, moanin' about the white man's ingratitude. That Summer they took the war-path. This here Injun went with 'em. Next Fall we caught 'em on a hill. I saw one of 'em about a hundred yards away and gave him my forty-five-seventy. Knocked him clear back over the hill. He was my Injun friend. Yeh. Dead as a sardine."

Old Lightning Jack brought the legs of his chair to the ground. The mail-flivver was rattling up to his door. Jack paused pensively for a moment before arising.

"He was a powerful dangerous Injun," he ruminated, "but gosh—if he was a white man, what a friend he'd have been!"

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The Myth-Killers

A Four-Part Story

Part III

by Hugh Pendexter

Author of "Long Rifles," "Red Autumn," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

I WAS making my way slowly down the Mississippi in the Summer of 1720 when John Law's tales of riches in the new world and his finance schemes had set all France mad with gold-fever. I had discovered along the banks an Indian sign which told me that the Natchez were preparing to declare war against the French in the Month of Peaches.

Later when I met Joe Labrador, my loyal friend, I felt no hesitation about continuing although he warned me that Governor de Bienville suspected me of being an English spy. English I certainly was, but the French believed I had been obliged to flee from Virginia and, with the information I had obtained regarding the threatened war, I felt that I could convince Monsieur de Bienville of my integrity.

As I approached Biloxi two French trappers joined me, and I was sure from their manner that my name had already been published as a spy. The town was in a turmoil. A ship from France had just landed, filled with settlers and a large number of women destined to become the wives of the Louisiana planters. It mattered little to these men that most of the women were the scourings of Paris. Among them I noticed one girl of such evident refinement that I wondered how she could be a member of this low crew. To my questions she said that her name was Claire Dahlsgaarde and that she was in great distress. Impulsively I offered to help her get to New Orleans although I knew it lessened my own chances of escape.

Monsieur de Bienville approached.

"Monsieur William Brampton," he said formally, "I charge you with being a spy in English employ. While the information you have given me may be correct I am obliged to hold you here until I am assured of your loyalty. You may have the freedom of the town, and I trust you will dine with me tonight."

"How long must I remain?" I questioned.

"Until I hear from my agent, Damoan the Fox, who is now on his way from Virginia," he answered.

My heart sank, for the Fox was the one man to whom I had confided all my plans, believing him to be trustworthy. That night I began making plans to escape, not forgetting *mademoiselle;* her danger for some reason was as great as my own.

TWO fishermen for a heavy bribe helped me to escape, but not until I had had a fight with Damoan the Fox, who had just returned to Biloxi. My heart sank, for I knew that he would trail me more relentlessly than any Indian.

However, I remembered my promise and managed to pick up *mademoiselle,* and I was greatly relieved when my good friend Joe Labrador promised to accompany us.

The girl refused to realize our danger as we made our way up the Mississippi. One evening as we were cooking supper she permitted herself to stand on the bank clearly outlined, while she called my attention to a canoe across the river.

I feared the worst for, should the party be headed by Damoan, I knew we had little chance of escape. We withdrew to the fire and awaited their coming

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT THE SMOKE BROUGHT

EVEN if the distant canoe was making for our smoke I did not see how I could break camp and hide in the forest, or take to the pirogue. Had I been alone the problem of avoiding the two men would have been child's play; but the girl would hold me back in the woods, while to continue in the pirogue would bring the men upon us. I was convinced they could not be some of Damoan's men, and this belief reconciled me somewhat to meeting them. On reaching the fire I observed that the girl not only had heaped on my stock of fuel, but, for good measure, had thrown on matted pine needles and chunks

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of forest-mold. I broke up the caked mold and hurriedly cleaned the fish. The girl watched my preparations with a little grimace. I feared she was overfastidious.

I broiled the fish on the coals and served it on two clean pieces of bark. She sat back from the fire and tentatively nibbled at some smoked meat but refused the fish. This was an arraignment of my rough-and-ready cooking, and provoking because she had made no offer to do the squaw-work herself. I was beginning to realize how entirely useless this young person was when it came to caring for herself. For one raised in poverty the instinct of self-preservation seemed to be very meagerly developed; of course, her hands should have told me that at the beginning.

"Have you no bread?" she artlessly asked.

"No bread, *mademoiselle*," I soberly replied.

She eyed the tough smoked meat disapprovingly; then bravely remarked—

"The fire burned well."

"Exceedingly well, *mademoiselle!*"

Another, and a longer pause; then she was timidly remarking:

"There came to me the absurd notion that *monsieur* was displeased because I used the wood. But I tell myself there is much wood, enough for all France. Also, the more wood the more coals."

It was on my tongue to add, "And the more visitors."

Instead I gently said: "There will be many times during the journey when what I ask may seem to be absurd. But I know *mademoiselle* will be so kind as to remember I ask nothing without a purpose behind it."

"Of course," she absent-mindedly replied.

There was silence for a minute, and she must have returned to my words and read between them, for she sharply demanded—

"What have I done that is wrong?"

"Nothing that is wrong. Only, this fire—I asked the wood to be fed on a little at a time. You put it all on at once—and stuff from the ground I had not collected."

"But it made a good fire, *monsieur*. You have said it yourself. I fear you are overnice in your exactions."

"I only mention it because the heavy smoke is drawing the strange canoe to our shore, and soon we shall have visitors," I gently explained. "I would have said nothing this time, but I did not want *mademoiselle* to be taken by surprize, and, perhaps, alarmed."

She scurried from the log to a position between me and the frail bark shelter, looking much like a little one frightened by an old nurse's bogy stories.

"This awful country, where the simplest act may bring death," she dramatically whispered.

I smiled reassuringly, and corrected:

"Hardly death, or we would not be here waiting. It is nothing—these strangers coming. I only mention them so *mademoiselle* will not be startled."

"You have your musket close by your side, as if you feared! I, too, will be ready."

And she pulled the sheathed dirk from her bosom and allowed it to hang outside her blouse. Then as an inspiration:

"But the log boat! We should hide it. Then they could not find us."

"Now that they have seen the smoke it is better that they find us," I answered. "If we should disappear they would find the fire, and they would go on up the river and tell of the deserted camp. It would be bad for them to tell such news to Damoan the Fox. So, *mademoiselle*, this is the place to meet the newcomers, and not the time to hide our pirogue."

Finishing my fish, I took my gun and said:

"*Mademoiselle's* courage is fine. She will sit where she is while I withdraw to one side."

"I do not understand," she faltered.

"By this time the two men will be landing near our pirogue. They will reconnoiter cautiously. I must get them to the fire to see who they are, to make sure they carry no tales ahead of us."

"But would you leave me alone?"

"Only as bait for the trap into which they must walk. As soon as they break cover I will be by your side. If they are simple woods-runners we will keep them with us until we are ready to depart. If they are men from *la Nouvelle* Orleans, sent after *me*, we will take away their arms and send them down the river."

"*Monsieur* does not go very far away?"

"Only inside the pines. Have courage. Nothing shall harm you."

"I am not afraid of men," she coldly replied, now sitting very erect. "It is the land, the great river, the unnameable loneliness, that brings fear. But I shall not disgrace you."

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The *grande dame* air in a doll; and yet she carried it off most excellently. I took my musket and slipped into cover and waited. I heard the two men climbing the bluff long before they should have betrayed themselves. The carelessness, or awkwardness, of their approach told me they were not *coureurs de bois*. This left them colonists from New Orleans, sent in blundering pursuit of me; and I was confident I could soon send them to the right about. As they gained the top of the bluff I began to catch bits of curses and grumbling. I circled about to get behind them as they approached the fire. Having surmounted the bluff neither was inclined to talk, but this was from lack of breath rather than from any idea of secrecy. For both stalked along, tripping over vines and roots and spilling faint oaths.

Now they were passing through the last fringe of bushes encircling the fire, and the girl suddenly gave a shrill scream. As I glided forward to close the trap I heard a rough voice yell in English:

"Blast my eyes if it ain't her! Ahoy, lass, where's your convoy?"

"Here!" I spoke up, stepping into the firelight, my musket across my left arm.

The girl was crouching behind a log and from her face one would have thought she was facing a panther. Old Six Fingers, more apish than ever, stood leering at her, his yellow snags showing in an ugly grin. He jumped about as I spoke, his right hand flying up, his fingers holding his knife by the tip of the blade. On recognizing me he lowered his arm, and with a scowl growled—

"So it's you, is it?"

"Ho, Monsieur Brampton, we meet again!" loudly greeted Narbonne, lunging clear of a grape-vine. "Behold, I give you the freedom of my river, the Mississippi!"

Then discovering the girl back of the log his whimsicality left him, and he began dusting the forest floor with his cap, and humbly announcing—

"*Mademoiselle*, command me. I throw myself at your feet."

She rose and seated herself on the log in an effort to recover her dignity, but never allowing her frightened eyes to stray long from the grinning face of Six Fingers.

"Monsieur Narbonne was so good as to do me a service in *la Nouvelle* Orleans. His presence is always most welcome," she nervously assured the Frenchman.

Six Fingers refused to be further ignored, and trying to compose his withered features he pressed forward and with much chuckling explained:

"We raised your smoke and ran in to see your colors. Aye, lad, it's good luck that brings us together on this cruise."

"We go up the river to find the country of Acaanibas, where diamonds grow on rose-bushes, and the women are almost as beautiful as *mademoiselle*," prattled Narbonne with a smirk at the girl.

"And now we've picked you up we'll sail in convoy," grinned Six Fingers.

And thereat he broke into some of his horrible sea doggerel and began chanting:

"Heave-ho! And the Devil
He sits in the sun!
Hurrah, bullies, for the Spanish Main!
Heave-ho! And the red blood
From white throats will run!
Hurrah!"

Narbonne was nearest to him, and with a backhanded sweep he stilled the vicious lips and sent Six Fingers over backwards. Spewing and spitting the old pirate came to his feet, hissing like a snake. The Frenchman strode close to him and softly said:

"I would spare *mademoiselle* the inconvenience of seeing you die. Come! I will take the matter up when we get back to the shore."

But I had no desire for either of the two to be traveling ahead of me. Narbonne would not wittingly harm me, but he was eccentric, to say the least. His companion was capable of any infamy if left unwatched. So I affected the rôle of pacificator, and said:

"Let bygones be bygones. Six Fingers forgot his sea-ditties are not for young ears. He will not forget again. Come, come, men; you'll need stout hearts for your journey to the Acaanibas. I shall need sturdy messmates for my part of the journey."

Six Fingers pressed his fingers to his split lips and made animal noises. Narbonne was staring at him coldly, one hand on the hilt of his sword. The old villain essayed something intended for an affable smile, and croaked:

"Rough day, mate; but I'm used to rough living and rough ways. I was forgetting the lass. I'll stay for'ard after this."

"Nothing could be said fairer," I heartily

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declared. "Now if you will eat I have some smoked meat and there's more fish in the river."

"We had food in the boat, *monsieur*," said Narbonne, still eying his companion malevolently.

"And there's a jug of brandy in the boat what I'll overhaul," cried Six Fingers.

I signaled for Narbonne to let him go, for his departure would give me a chance to talk alone with the Frenchman. Once Six Fingers had disappeared toward the edge of the bluff I drew Narbonne farther apart from the girl and said—

"You know I am being hunted?"

"*La Nouvelle* Orleans fairly crawls with the news," he replied.

"Perhaps you do not know that there are those ahead whom I fear more than all those remaining behind. I do not know how far I can trust your companion, but to you I tell this. At Point Coupée, a day's journey from here, the river makes a big loop. My enemies will, I believe, follow the main channel. There is a small bayou, or canal, not more than six feet wide and usually choked with drift at the opening. If I can reach that unseen and cut across the loop I will save a day. It is at Point Coupée I plan to get ahead of my pursuers."

Narbonne stiffly answered:

"*Monsieur*, I have an equity in this cursed river. I am a landed proprietor. I have invested a hundred thousand livres in this country. I am responsible for law and order. I shall go with you to protect you."

He said it as if standing in the center of broad ancestral acres, as if an army of minions was ready to carry out his every wish. And his heart was as honest in its purpose as if he had commanded the obedience and servility paid to Louis XIV in his life-time.

"It is like you, *monsieur*," I said, sighing in my heart that a spy for England should have to accept help from this simple, yet loyal, Frenchman. Only the fact he was serving the woman in serving me made it easier. I tried to thank him for carrying my note to Mademoiselle Dahlsgaarde, but he would not permit, declaring:

"Nay, not so. The thanks are for me to utter. It gave me the rarest pleasure to speak with *mademoiselle* again. I am in your debt. But that rascal now at the brandy! I should have killed him at the start. Perhaps Fate will weary of him and see that he dies in the country of Acaanibas."

The girl now shyly advanced and extended a hand to Narbonne, saying—

"I have the brave Frenchman to thank once more."

The absurd fellow was all but kneeling as he reverently kissed the slim hand, his cap gathering more grime from the forest-mold. And I was pop-eyed to observe how calmly she accepted his homage. In truth, she was more natural and more at ease when accepting this exaggerated attention than she was in watching me honestly broiling a catfish. She retired to her log, pulling us along after her by the exquisite charm of her manner. It caused me grim amusement, and some chagrin, to realize she waited until Narbonne was present before exercising the height of her charm. With a glance to make sure Six Fingers was not within hearing she confessed—

"*Messieurs*, I am much afraid of that man."

Narbonne bowed and turned to leave us, but I seized his arm and detained him. He roughly shook off my grasp and whispered:

"Did you not hear? I have endured the little beast, but surely *mademoiselle* should not be annoyed."

She understood this byplay and was between us, and he did not shake off her hand as it caressed his arm.

"If you have respect for the women of France you will dismiss such black thoughts from your mind," she murmured. "Of course I feel no fear when you two are with me."

To me her fear of Six Fingers was incomprehensible. Doubtless he had terrorized her during the voyage to Ship Island, but his days of wickedness were behind him. He was only a senile old spider of a man, who could do no mischief beyond hurling a knife and guzzling brandy.

Narbonne surrendered his purpose of seeking Six Fingers and putting him to the sword, and said:

"The old thief goes with me to the land of Acaanibas, where his pirate's soul can revel over hills of gold. He will not discommode *mademoiselle*. We two will push on ahead."

I believed she welcomed this proposal, but I feared for Six Fingers' treacherous old tongue if he fell in with Damoan. It

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was not my plan to have him ahead of me, spreading the news of our coming.

"Our ways, *monsieur*, are the same for many leagues," I said. "It is my wish that you and your companion travel in our company."

With a side-glance I directed the girl to second the invitation. She returned my look rather defiantly, but was warm and gracious in adding:

"I also ask it. You will not refuse me, *monsieur?*"

"God pity a madness which would permit me to refuse you, *mademoiselle*," he piously exclaimed. "Now we will take the creature from the brandy, or the King of Acaanibas will go with a dry throat."

After he had withdrawn from her presence, mincing and prancing in an incongruous fashion, Narbonne continued:

"It is incredible, *monsieur*, the amount of drink that withered one can hold—There was a night a bit ago, in a trader's cabin, when he drank and drank——"

"And gourds came through the window," I whispered.

He stared at me curiously, then smiled and silently grasped my hand.

"I have you to thank. I understand. The *coureurs de bois* said it was the working of some heathen god. In this marvelous country, where diamonds grow like vegetables, I was blaming it on nature. *Monsieur* has my appreciation."

"Of course you do not really believe there is any land called Acaanibas?"

He came to a full stop and incredulously repeated:

"No Acaanibas? Impossible."

"There is no such land, *monsieur*. It is nearly twenty years since the story was first told by Matthieu Sagean, the Canadian."

"But, pardon, Monsieur Brampton. Comte de Pontchartrain vouched for the truth of it," he feebly persisted.

"I have been through the region—the Falls of St. Anthony—where he located the fairyland. It was not there. It never was there."

"*Mon Dieu!*" he muttered, wiping his forehead. "Is there anything true about this country?"

"All you have seen is true. It continues the same to the great lakes in the north. Wild waters. Wild woods. Wild men and beasts. No diamonds. No gold or silver as yet found. No giants, nor dwarfs. No place where the Indians are anything but Indians. No land of plenty until you clear the ground, plant and reap."

"Ah! That Matthieu Sagean!" he muttered. "I would like to lend him half my sword—through the ribs. *Monsieur*, I am shocked. My hundred thousand livres will never come back to me. Ah, well. We must say nothing to the old rat below. In *la Nouvelle* Orleans I saw how his presence annoyed *mademoiselle*. So I let him into my plans. He agreed to go north with me. The promise of untold gold made him forget *mademoiselle*. He has lived in France for years. He is scum; and yet he has power to frighten *mademoiselle*. It is all very bewildering. He shall think the land is still there; and he shall go with me."

"You will go on?"

"*Pardieu!* I must. And after all, there are many things not known about this country of the damned. Perhaps I, François Narbonne, may find riches after all! If not, I will be as well off at the start. Ho, ho! Down the hill there, old rat! Are you lost? I am about to offer fifteen thousand shares of the Country of the Indies at five thousand livres a share. Who wants any Mississippi?"

"Aye, aye, I hear you. But batten down your hatch, or we'll have a boarding-party after our brandy. A canoe passed downstream a bit ago. Too dark to make out their rigging, but they spoke a foreign lingo, neither Spanish, French, nor good old English. Wild Indians, I've logged it."

"One of my enemy's canoes, scouting the back-trail," I whispered to Narbonne. "His Choctaws must have discovered my smoke, and some of them are out to locate it. I must make the cut-off at Point Coupée as quickly as possible. It will take a day of hard paddling. If I can make it I will be within two days of the Humas' principal village, where I can hide if necessary. If you are still minded to help *mademoiselle* forget her fears——"

"I would gladly paddle through —— to ease *mademoiselle's* mind, *monsieur*," he gravely interrupted.

I called out to Six Fingers to leave the brandy in the canoe as we should be starting up the river very soon. He cursed most horribly and vowed he would travel no more by night. Narbonne told him:

"Then stay here and be killed by the

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first Indians, you dog. But I hurry on to the land of the Acaanibas, where there are nothing but wonderous fruits and flowers and beautiful maidens, and hills of gold and silver, and precious stones in the place of pebbles."

With that he started back to the girl.

"High wind abeam and a heavy sea! If there's nothing in this yarn of his I'll be cutting some one's throat before I fetch blue water again," I heard Six Fingers mumbling.

I waited for him to come up the bank, which he mounted with the agility of a monkey. He reeked of brandy and was in a beastly humor.

"Cheer up," I said with malicious enjoyment. "There is gold ahead, a gold-mine."

"Aye? That's why the —— bites me," he grunted. "There's two gold-mines ahead, and I can't take both of them. This Narbonne's a crazy fool. If he'd told the yarn I'd laughed at it. But the second officer of the *Maire* believes it. He had talked with this Sagean, who visited the land, for Sagean for years was in the marines."

"And the second gold-mine?"

"Don't you wish you knew, my brave cock?" he mocked, his brandy giving him assurance. "Hark 'e! A man who helped sack St. Augustine, and who has seen many a stout lad—some women, too—try to walk on the ocean with their eyes blindfolded, knows how to keep his hatch closed. Just now I'm laying a course for the land of the Acaanibas. If it wasn't for that I'd have left this French madman adrift long ago."

"With his throat cut," I added.

"Aye! Like that, maybe," he coolly agreed. He swung on ahead of me, and I knew the brandy had stirred up thoughts of the old days; for in a low voice he was whining something about:

> "Low down, hull down,
> We're off for Portobello-O
> Women and drink, and the Isthmus stink,
> And our cap'n 's very mellow-O."

He was as poisonous as a swamp-moccasin, but age had drawn his fangs; he was merely a shell filled with wicked memories and evil longings. If not for the danger of his babbling to Damoan I would have set him adrift with his brandy with as little compunction as I would shoot an alligator. When I came to the fire the girl and Narbonne were seated side by side before the dying bed of coals, the ruddy light playing on their faces and giving me the impression she was more at ease in his company than in mine. She rose as Six Fingers and I stepped clear of the bushes, and I knew she was shrinking from his leering gaze. She asked—

"Are we to move on tonight?"

"It is best. There is a particular stage on the river I wish to make. If we can travel till near daybreak we can camp for the greater part of the day and reach Point Coupée at twilight. You can sleep in the pirogue while we travel tonight."

"I was not thinking of myself," she reproached. "I was thinking of you, *monsieur*, who must be so weary. And I know all this extra labor is because of me."

A man never takes amiss the pity and sympathy of a woman. He may deride it and he may know he is not deserving of it, but deep in his heart he worships the notion and feels like purring; for it is one form of a caress. I mumbled something intended to make light of it. She was foolish enough to imagine I resented her solicitude; whereas I was pleasurably confused and appeared to be gruff to cover up my diffidence. One can not spend three years in unfrequented regions without being supersensitive to any well-spoken woman's concern. So I ushered Six Fingers down the bank and left the Frenchman to escort *mademoiselle*.

THE unbroken forest-walls inclosing the river made it a tunnel of blackness with scarcely no relief from the Summer stars. There was danger in night travel as at any moment the canoe might run into a floating tree. After a few minutes on the water, however, I found my night eyes, and could see far enough ahead to give warning to the canoe behind. But if the risk be very imminent it would be less than the danger of being found by Damoan and his Choctaws. It was obvious the Fox had camped within an easy day's journey of the Red Stick, as shown by the canoe of Indians passing our camping-place in search of our smoke. The Choctaws would never travel the river at night unless their business was urgent.

With the girl on the blankets behind me I led the way, after warning Narbonne and Six Fingers to keep close and indulge in no talking. I kept well inshore and made fair

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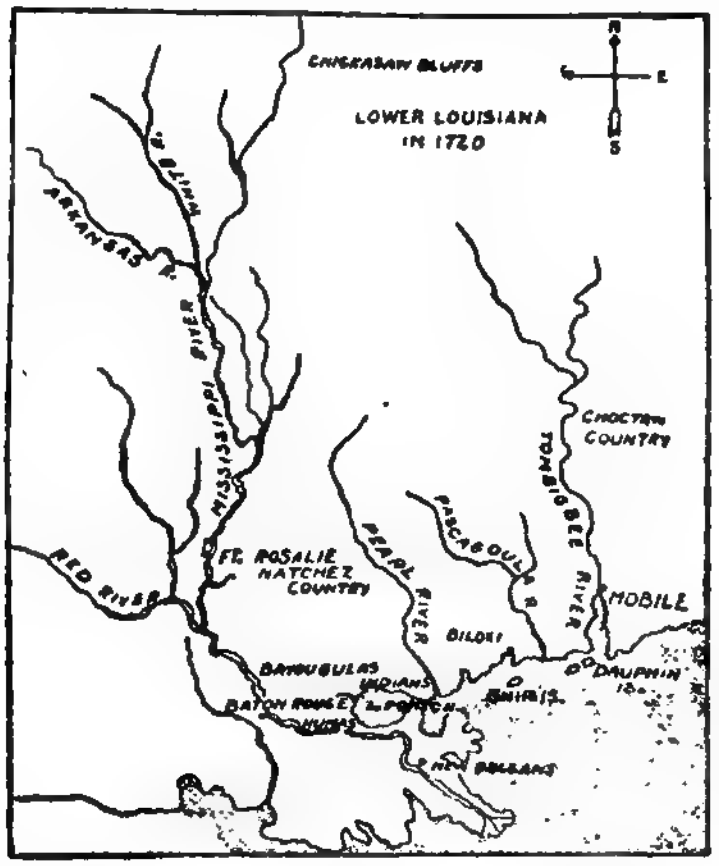
speed, considering the keen watch I had to maintain. My vision penetrated the obscurity for three-score feet. All went smoothly for two hours and the girl fell asleep and seemed to be resting comfortably. Once or twice my companions forgot my cautioning and talked so I could overhear them above the murmuring rush of the river. An Indian's ears would have picked



up the sound at a considerable distance, and I ceased paddling so they might catch up with me and receive a second warning.

Six Fingers was insistent on singing some of his evil old sea-songs and Narbonne was quick to curse him out for his indiscretion. I was patiently explaining the dangers of their carelessness when the girl emitted a shriek that could have been heard for a long distance. I dropped my paddle and stretched out a hand to arouse her from her bad dream, but as I touched her she seemed to be crawling overboard, and her voice was suddenly stilled. Thoroughly nonplused I could not compel my mind to function until her stifled voice choked out—

"Save me, Englishman!"

Then I detected something in the water alongside the pirogue which had no business there, and my fingers encountered a brawny arm. As I clutched the naked flesh ten fingers seized my wrist, and the girl, released, screamed again. The pirogue careened as the thing in the water sought to drag me overboard. Clearing my ax I relieved the strain by leaping over the side, yelling as I went—

"Sit still!"

As I struck the water the hand released my wrist and two hands grabbed at my throat. Down we sank, and down swung my ax as we were going under. I felt the ax register, and the grip on my throat loosened. I kicked about and wrenched the ax free and satisfied myself the naked body was lax and limp, and then shot to the surface. Shaking the water from my ears I called to Narbonne to paddle to the girl. Almost as I spoke something bumped into me. It was a pirogue, and as my hand went over the side and touched a fringed legging and elicited a squeal of terror I knew it was my pirogue.

"Hush, *mademoiselle*. It is all right. I softly told her before attempting to climb into the pirogue. "Hush your noise."

"*Le bon Dieu!*" she moaned. "Is it indeed thou, *monsieur?*"

"No other. All is well."

And I washed the ax and stuck it in my belt and climbed aboard and began anxiously peering about to see from what craft my assailant had swum.

"What is it?" I heard Narbonne cry.

"Stand by to repel boarders!" howled Six Fingers.

"Ah, the ——! How blind I am!" snapped Narbonne, and I heard his sword slithering against iron.

"In your throat! How does it taste?" cried Six Fingers.

"God help us! They fight between themselves!" faintly exclaimed the girl.

"They're attacked," I corrected, sweeping the pirogue about and heading downstream where I could make out the vague shapes of two canoes some distance apart.

"There's some Mississippi for you, my friend!" panted Narbonne; and a wild death-cry of a Choctaw cut through the velvet night.

With a wild warwhoop the canoe of the enemy began closing in on my two companions, their first assailants being Choctaws who thought to take them by surprize by swimming.

"I am about to fire my musket, *mademoiselle*," I warned as I trained the gun on the hostile pirogue. Nevertheless the explosion brought a yelp from the girl and a prolonged howl from the enemy.

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"Decks are cleared!" cried Six Fingers, meaning they had beaten off or killed the swimmers.

"Is all well with *monsieur* and *mademoiselle?*" shouted Narbonne.

A flight of arrows hissed over my head and one or two stuck in the side of my pirogue. I snatched my pistols up from the bottom of the pirogue and emptied them, and then braced myself to use the musket as a club. I called to Narbonne to watch out for the advancing canoe.

He fired two pistols and Six Fingers let off a musket, and the pirogue frantically retreated towards mid-channel and downstream.

"Naked men in the water attacked us, *monsieur*," explained Narbonne as our pirogues difted together. "I got one and the old rat dirked another. How is *mademoiselle?*"

"*Dieu merci!* I think I shall live, but I was dying of the fright," she whispered. "Red hands at my throat! Can I ever forget when they would drag me into the river!"

"But they did not, *mademoiselle*," I sharply reminded her. "A danger passed is as though it never happened. Be calm."

"And you went into the water! When your hand came over the side of the boat and touched me, *helas!* I——"

"There, there," I soothed. "I jumped in to make the rascal let you alone. They are worse frightened than we. They have all gone. There is no more danger."

"I had one ——'s gullet opened before he knew what had him," gloated Six Fingers.

Narbonne commanded him to be silent and asked what I purposed doing.

"*Mademoiselle* is nervous. We will land and wait until she recovers her composure," I said.

Her fingers closed on my arm, and she whispered:

"After all it was only Death that stalked me. Death is clean. It was its coming while I slept that unnerved me. *Monsieur*, you prefer to make a certain distance before daylight. It is well. Proceed. Do not consider me. I am myself now. It is nothing."

"A fire and a dram," grumbled Six Fingers.

Her hand shook as she heard his voice so close to her side; and she whispered:

"Go on, go on, *monsieur*. I was forgetting. You are wet. We must land and make a fire that you may dry yourself."

I was amused at her simplicity and pleased at her forethought; and soberly assured her my wetting was nothing, that rapid paddling would soon dry me out. After reloading my musket and pistols and seeing that Six Fingers did the same I again took the lead.

This time there was no need to caution my companions as to the value of silence. Nor did we again glimpse the Indians' pirogue although we kept to the river until well into the gray morning.

CHAPTER IX

THE FIGHT AT THE BAYOU

WE CAMPED and rested, and the remainder of the journey to the big loop was finished late in the afternoon with nothing occurring to disturb *mademoiselle*. During the trip Narbonne was hard put to keep up with me as Six Fingers got at the jug again and incapacitated himself; or, as I believed, he pretended to be helpless. It would have served him right had we thrown him overboard, and yet he had made a gallant fight when the Choctaw swimmers attacked the pirogue. He was quick enough with his knife and could display the courage of a cornered rat. Since the fight, however, he had grown more sullen and his surreptitious bout with the brandy was the climax.

Narbonne, as well as *mademoiselle*, was awed by the river. If not for the need of keeping up with me the Frenchman would have passed under a spell and have lost ground rapidly; for he was ever suspending his paddling to stare at the broad stretch of the stream as if expecting it to finish pouring around the next bend and become something which is all ended. The girl grasped the side of the pirogue with both hands and marveled at the great trees and other drift swirling by as we kept inshore.

The river talked to me, too. It taunted me with threats of ambuscades along the silent, brooding shore, it whispered of Damoan the Fox cunningly awaiting us at the big loop. The influence of the mighty waters rather worked on my nerves, and when an unusually large area of drift first appeared around the next bend I paddled to the bank and leaped shore to reconnoiter

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it from a tree. I was suddenly taken with the notion that we had been seen and that Damoan's canoes were stealing upon us under cover of the onsweeping mass.

I hurriedly explained my purpose to Narbonne and the girl and had them come ashore and hide while I threw green boughs over the pirogues without bothering to extricate Six Fingers from the bottom of his canoe. Near the bank I found a tall pine and climbed it until I had an excellent view of the river beyond the solid mass of drifting trees. My fears were empty. There was no sign of Damoan's red hunters. Ashamed of my panic, yet greatly relieved, I descended.

Only a few feet from the tree I came upon the scene of a recent tragedy— a dead Indian. A feathered shaft stuck from between his naked shoulders and he had fallen while in the act of setting an arrow to bowstring. The scavangers of the woods had not disturbed him, and I knew his death must be very recent, and that his slayer had departed without knowing he had made a kill; or else he had been frightened away before he could secure the usual trophies.

The dead man was a Natchez. The light mahogany complexion and regular features would have told me that even if I had not observed how the back of the head was shaved, with the exception of half a dozen locks on the crown. On the sides the hair was cut short except for a long braid hanging down on the left side. He had traveled a considerable distance from the village, for he wore moccasins of deerskin, whereas he would have been barefooted if not intending to wander far from his village.

He was in the country of the Humas, who were of Choctaw blood and included in that confederacy. As I reconstructed the tragedy he had been shot down from behind by a Huma and had run away and escaped discovery although ultimately dropping dead. I took the bow of acacia-wood and the quiver of reed arrows. The heads of the latter, fashioned from bone, were not barbed like the war-arrows, but were such as were used in hunting deer and buffalo.

The dead man had not been on a war-path. Carrying the bow and arrows, I returned to my companions, and, to spare the girl's feelings, explained I had found the weapons in the wood and thought to use them in securing small game when it was not advisable to use a gun. Clearing the pirogues of brush I set off with the girl with Narbonne following close.

"You saw no one?" asked the girl.

"The river is empty. If my enemy awaits for me it will be in the bend as the bayou is usually choked with dead trees, and he will not expect me to take that route."

We worked hard, for only a short period of daylight remained for us. It was the beginning of dusk when we came to the tiny bayou. In the dark we would have missed it entirely as it was fairly blocked with drift. I drove my pirogue to the eastern side of the blockade and jumped out to investigate. By carrying the pirogues a hundred feet we could take to open water again. I aroused Six Fingers from his slumbers, real or assumed, by the simple process of taking him by the shoulders and sousing him up and down in the river. He began a string of fearful curses, but by thrusting his monkey's head under water I soon took the heart out of him.

Tossing him ashore, I ordered him to help Narbonne with one end of the pirogue while I took the other. *Mademoiselle* walked behind us as we carried the pirogue, then back with us when we went to fetch the other. Nor did she bethink to catch up any of our effects, such as blankets, the bag of smoked meat, or any of the weapons. It was necessary for me to make the third trip to get these.

I was elated at having gained the cut-off without having to fight my way. I felt so safe with that hundred feet of drift hiding me from the river that I directed Narbonne slowly to paddle my pirogue and the girl along the bayou with Six Fingers bringing up the other while I tried my luck hunting. Pointing out a dead pine far ahead, I told Narbonne to halt there and build a small fire, taking care to shield it with blankets.

"We'll camp long enough to rest and eat and then push on," I told them. "It will save a full day's paddling and a possible encounter with Damoan and his Choctaws."

The girl was impatient to resume the journey at once, and even declared her willingness to eat fish if it would require much time to secure game. I promised her I would not go far, and if game was scarce would be with them almost before they reached the dead tree. Then taking the bow and arrows, and my ax, I scouted toward the main river in the hope of finding some waterfowl.

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At less than a fourth of a mile I shaped my course to be parallel with the cut-off, but move as silently as I would I could find no birds. When I was about opposite the dead tree I decided it was growing too dark for hunting and began making for the camp. As I turned my back a rustling in the underbrush behind me revived my hopes and I glided behind a clump of bushes and slipped an arrow from the quiver. The ground was clear of growth for a few rods, and as the sound was repeated I fully expected to see a rabbit enter the opening.

With the silence of a shadow a Choctaw warrior emerged from the growth and stood as if listening. Then his head sank and, as I hesitated, undecided whether to take the offensive or attempt a silent retreat, he dropped on his knees and began examining the ground. Too late I realized that he had found my tracks and would know at the first glance that a white man had been there. The tracks were so fresh that the moisture from the miry ground had scarcely had time to seep into the imprints. My next thought was the necessity of preventing the fellow from reporting his discovery. As he leaped erect I released the arrow. His yell of discovery was a second ahead of the reed shaft, and although he went down with the arrow sticking through his neck he had done what I intended to prevent.

That his companions were close at hand was proven by the almost immediate response to his wild cry; then there came the sound of men crashing recklessly through the growth. When the scout failed to answer their loud inquiries they knew he was dead, and the excited calls and the carelessness of their advance ceased. The growth was drowsily quiet, but I feared the silence more than their clamor. Next they were pouring from cover in single file until I counted an even dozen, and there were more behind among the bushes. It was too dark for me to pick out old acquaintances, although there must have been several in the band whom I had met among the Gulf settlements. The first warrior in the opening came to the dead warrior and dropped beside him and examined the arrow. Another was casting about for a trail. If the arrow was drawn out they would know it was the shaft of a hunter.

"What do you find?" spoke up a soft voice from the bushes. It was Damoan the Fox speaking.

Before he could receive his answer I sounded the shrill war-cry of the Natchez and began discharging the arrows as fast as I could manipulate the bow. With cries of alarm and rage the Choctaws swept back into cover, for the moment believing the Natchez had taken the red path against the French and their allies the Gulf Indians. As I loosed the last arrow I turned and made toward the dead pine. Damoan's voice rose in a cry of triumph, and in Choctaw he shouted:

"The White Indian! It's the man we're after. These are hunting arrows. He plays tricks with the Natchez arrows. He is alone. After him!"

My sole advantage was the waning light, which made it difficult to follow my trail. I moved as cautiously as possible, so that no sound might betray me. By the calls of the Choctaws I knew they were strung out in a long line, with Damoan behind them eager to give the *coup de mort*. The Fox was brave enough when the occasion required, but he was never one to risk his life when he could fight behind a barrier. I ran on and soon struck the cut-off close to the pine. I saw the glow of the fire, the blankets not having been used to hide it. With a leap I was on the other side and kicking the fire into the water.

"What's wrong?" whispered *mademoiselle*.

"Into the pirogue! Quick! Narbonne! Six Fingers! Aboard and follow me quietly. We have a few minutes!"

They obeyed without a word, and with the girl lying flat to escape ball or arrow we worked rapidly along the sluggish, narrow lane. My great fear was that we should find much drift choking the upper end of the cut-off, and would be forced to make a carry. No sounds came from the woods to establish the position of our pursuers; and as the quiet continued the girl lifted her head and tremulously whispered:

"They have gone away, *monsieur*. We have escaped them."

I pitied her because of the rude awakening her hope was to receive. The profound silence told me the Choctaws were making every exertion to find me. Each time I brought my paddle up my right hand half-reached for the gun resting in the bow; for at any moment I expect to be attacked from the bushes lining the bank. It was an actual relief to me, even though it made the girl moan in terror, when Damoan's

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high-pitched mellow hunting-call floated to our ears.

"It is nothing," I told her. "They have found our camp. They will not know whether we returned south, or came this way."

She did not discover any discrepancy in this statement, although it was so obvious a child should have realized that the discovery of us on the cut-off would point only to one course of flight—the course we were taking.

The pirogue behind bumped into mine, and Narbonne was hissing:

"Are you mad, old rat? You are running into *mademoiselle*."

"We must go faster!" croaked Six Fingers, trying to pass me.

Before I could discipline him Narbonne had cracked a paddle over his pate, and was jeering:

"*Eh bien!* It is time that I, the first Mississippian, took command of this ship, poltroon."

"But softly, *monsieur!*" I begged over my shoulder.

"——!" gritted Six Fingers. But he did not attempt to crowd by me again.

Nor did Damoan call again. I knew they were following the cut-off, bounding along the bank like so many dark devils. I knew they had read the signs about our fire and knew how many were in the party, and that one was a woman. I picked up speed a bit and soon slid my pirogue up the inclined surface of a sunken log. I leaped to the bank and helped *mademoiselle* out, and whispered to Narbonne to give me a hand. He ran his canoe along side and I stepped aboard, and the two of us were pulling my canoe off the log, when with a wild howl they were upon us.

I snatched up my musket from the pirogue and fired at the first man to break through the bushes. I shouted for Narbonne to take the girl along in his pirogue, and then called on Six Fingers to follow me. With a leap I struck the edge of the bank and went down on all fours. A Choctaw tripped on my head and pitched into the water. The darkness served to hamper the red men once I was among them. I discharged one pistol, the second missing fire, and pulled my ax. Somewhere in the background Damoan was shouting encouragement to the Indians, and I tried to get to him, knowing that once he was down his allies would lose heart.

Now the Choctaws in their wars have acted mostly on the defensive, and, while a brave people, they do not have the dash and courage in offensive fighting that is characteristic of the Chickasaws, the Cherokees, and the Shawanoes. Hindered by the increasing darkness, and wishing to do for me with the least possible sacrifice, they permitted what should have been a brief affair to grow into a serious one. Had they acted promptly and with the wildcat fury of the Iroquois in the north, or even of almost any of their southern neighbors I never would have risen from the bank. But they hesitated, fearing to do each other damage, and I was soon among them, leaping and dodging and clubbing my musket. They got in each other's way and gave each other blows in spite of all their caution. Yet they fought in silence, which is always an excellent sign of stout-heartedness in the red man; and during the first minute of the confusion only Damoan's high voice was to be heard. Then came *mademoiselle's* voice, crying—

"I wait for *monsieur*."

And I knew she had refused to put off with Narbonne and leave me. The next moment Narbonne was at my side, and I surmised that Six Fingers had refused to follow me.

"*Hein!* Good thrust!" cried Narbonne as he placed his back to mine and scored.

"Fall back and throw your axes!" yelled Damoan in Choctaw.

But as the Indians gave ground we pressed forward. From the sounds of trampling feet back of the first line I was led to believe they had received reinforcements, and that the pirogue attacking us down-river had been coming up-river to join Damoan, rather than a portion of his original force sent to scout the back-track. I warned Narbonne to drop flat just in time to escape the axes which now *whirred* over our heads. After the first volley of axes we were up again, and what with the night and our constant shifting of position this mode of attack was not persisted in. Of all the axes thrown only one came near to doing damage, and that when a handle rapped me viciously on the head in its spinning flight.

A brave fell against me, one arm still raised and holding a knife. I caught him as he would have slipped to the ground, and holding him before me rushed forward a

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few yards. Narbonne followed close behind me, his long sword playing on the flanks; and inside of sixty seconds we had advanced a score of feet from the bank and had good clearance room. The dead man held before me quivered and jerked about from several blows, nor did I believe the red man realized they were striking their own dead. I am convinced of their ignorance on this point because one of the warriors took time to yell back to Damoan:

"They will not die! My ax has chopped a hole in one, and he still fights!"

"Rush them with your knives!" fumed Damoan.

"Ho. You, Frenchman! Stand out and do your own fighting!" mocked Narbonne.

Back across the bayou Six Fingers was yelping.

"Don't shoot, *mademoiselle!* I go!"

I came near to braining him as he gained my side, a shriveled, withered spider of a creature. One of his vile pirate oaths identified him before my ax could end his unsavory existence. He came in the nick of time, and if I have belittled him as a man, and if he was loath to risk his hide until compelled, I had to acknowledge his worth as a fighting machine once he entered the fray. Small of stature, further bowed by years, he fought close to the ground. Almost under my feet and hard to discern he darted his knife in and out and croaked horrible words. For a bit the Choctaws actually gave ground before our desperate onrush, and I began to fear Damoan would steal around the flanks and capture the girl. It was a relief to hear his voice and to know he was still behind his warriors.

"I am François L'Olonnois, who sacked Central America in 'Sixty-five! I am Mansvelt, the throat-slitter. I am Henry Morgan, the Welshman, Mansvelt's second officer, and the greatest of the Coast Brothers!" screamed Six Fingers.

A knife ripped my forearm, and I cracked the fellow's skull. Narbonne was shouting:

"Who wants any Mississippi? Ten thousand shares for eighteen thousand livres! Diamonds overnight, and a heavenly crown!"

He broke off panting for breath and laughing hysterically.

Six Fingers began howling his proscribed refrain:

> Heave-ho! And the Devil
> He sits in the sun,
> Hurrah, lads, for the Spanish main!
> Heave-ho! And the red blood
> From white throats will run,
> Hurrah, lads, for the gold of Spain!

It was time to rush back to the bayou, for we were surely done for if we advanced farther from the pirogues. Narbonne began coughing and I knew he was wounded although he kept his feet. Six Fingers began a second stanza of his evil song, gave a screech and went down between my feet.

"Back to the canoes!" I cried to Narbonne. "Get the girl away if you can while I stand them off."

It was our one opportunity to retreat without being thrust through the back; for either the Choctaws were for the moment dismayed at their lack of success, or else Six Fingers gruesome ditty was being interpreted as a big and new war medicine, or perhaps they had sensed Narbonne's madness, and were now drawing off and ignoring Damoan's frantic exhortations to continue the attack.

Had it been light enough for him to distinguish us from his own men he would have soon ended the battle with his deadly musket; and there was not his superior with a flintlock in all the valley. I scooped up Six Fingers under my arm and minded his weight no more than as if he had been a child. Narbonne, still coughing, gave ground and kept at my side.

"Faster!" I urged, as I heard the Indians rallying for a rush.

To my alarm he began wasting his breath by crying:

"Who takes some of Monsiegneur La's' Mississippi? Who takes golden Mississippi, indorsed by Monsieur le Regent? From the Banque Royale to the India Company and then back to the banque. *Va au diable!* We will let out some of your selfishness!"

And to my horror he turned and ran back through the darkness to meet the charging enemy, coughing and calling out mad words.

I was now at the bayou, and the girl was screaming in terror. Six Fingers was limp, yet breathing. To go after my poor friend was out of the question, as it was only a matter of seconds before I too should be renewing the fighting. Whether he intended it or not there was great virtue in Narbonne's madness, for the Choctaws yelled loudly when he struck their line, and

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doubtless they believed the three of us were on them again. He held up their advance for a bit before they could get the truth straight in their minds. A faint voice behind me called—

"*Qui est là?*"

"Brampton. Get into the canoe."

"*Grace a Dieu!*" he choked.

I too thanked God to have the mad fellow back. I knew he must be seriously, possibly mortally wounded, by the way he staggered and bumped against me. With Six Fingers in my arms I could not lend him assistance. But what was amazing was the fact that the howling of the Choctaws did not come nearer, nor did Damoan cease his shouting although it was impossible to decipher what he said because of the din. An what were the ——s yowling about?

"Into the pirogue!" I repeated.

"*En avant!*" was the half-strangled reply.

From directly ahead of me came *mademoiselle's* voice, surprizingly steady for one who had been so busily screaming; and she was demanding—

"Who is it?"

"Brampton."

"I will put up my knife for the time, *monsieur*. They would have found me dead. The boat is free from the obstacle. Are you all there?"

"We are all here. Into the pirogue! Can you manage a paddle till we get out of this hell?" I asked Narbonne.

The half-smothered voice answered in the affirmative. I dropped Six Fingers into a canoe and scooped a hatful of water on to his head. I turned to join *mademoiselle* in my pirogue, still wondering why the Choctaws should remain aloof and keep up their hideous yelling, and a splash told me my friend had fallen into the water. I caught him by the shoulder and pulled to the side of my pirogue and received the surprize of my life to find his arms were tightly drawn behind his back and bound with a thong.

I was no believer in fairy-stories, but how could he enter a fight, be trussed up and then escape without his captors giving pursuit? It was beyond my comprehension unless I explained it by magic. As I frantically worked over the rawhide cords *mademoiselle* attempted to aid me, and she cried:

"God help us! His mouth!"

I finished with his hands and felt of his face and found new cause for astonishment. A cord, like a gag, ran from his mouth to the back of his head, cutting the corners of his mouth, and making speech very difficult. The whole situation was more grotesque than any of the myths about Acaanibas.

"Had me gagged, tied," he faintly mumbled. "Got rid of gag. Couldn't slip the cord. Don't you know me?"

"Know you?" I began, sadly shaken at the poor fellow's experience. And I commenced lifting him into the pirogue, for until now he had been standing up to his waist in the water. Then from the bush, back where the savages were still yowling, came Narbonne's mad voice shouting:

"Ten thousand shares! Twenty thousand livres! Who wants any Mississippi? Immortality!"

I had my man by the throat as he came over the side of the pirogue, and my ax was over his head, as I gritted—

"Who in the fiend's name are you?"

"Joe Labrador, old friend! Don't you know me?" he gasped. Then the Choctaws raised their scalp-cry, and there was no more sound of fighting.

CHAPTER X

LIFTING THE PEACE PIPE

WE WERE unmolested in our escape from the cut-off, and although forced to land by another barrier of drift the carry was short, and in the bright sunshine we continued our journey. We paddled desperately, placing bend after bend between us and the big loop. Damoan, so long as he did not intercept us in the cut-off, would be compelled to return to his pirogues and lose much time in completing the loop. The girl slept much of the morning, and Labrador and I stuck to the paddles till late in the afternoon, when we were forced to give up.

Aided by the Canadian I soon had the pirogues cunningly concealed and had chosen a retired hollow where we could rest and eat. Labrador caught some fish while I examined Six Fingers' wound—a clout over the head which would soon mend. I built the fire, no larger than my hat, and used no wood that would give off a smoke; and as a further precaution I spread blankets on the bushes between it and the river. I had had no time for an explanation from Labrador until now.

Not a word was spoken while the fish was

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being broiled and placed beside the last of the smoked-meat on a big strip of bark. This time mademoiselle was too famished to be fastidious, and ate greedily of the fish and found it not so bad as my crude cooking had prepared her to believe. Six Fingers continued to stare blankly at Labrador, his mind confounded by the amazing transformation. After we had eaten and were ready to post guards for the night I nodded for Labrador to tell his story.

"Damoan the Fox came to *la Nouvelle* Orleans in the night," he began. "He had an order from Sieur de Bienville for all to aid him in his search for the White Indian. Damoan selected me to go with him and his Choctaws. There were twelve Indians in one pirogue and six more with us. His Indians found signs in the empty Indian village north of the settlement. A woman was missing and a woman's tracks were found there. The Fox took pirogues and started up the river, leaving orders for more Choctaws to follow him when they arrived from Biloxi. When we passed the Iberville I saw my friend drop in the bush.

"The Indians were busy with their paddling and watching the bank ahead and saw nothing. Damoan thought he saw something, but was not sure. I lied to him and said there was nothing. Afterwards he grew suspicious and sent back a canoe. We camped on the big loop, waiting for more Choctaws to come up. Something held them back, for they had not come up when the fight began. (My guess was correct that these reinforcements were the red men who had attacked us on the water.) Damoan is a ——. He reads men's minds, as a red tracker reads a trail. Without warning, just before the fight at the bayou began, he had me seized, my hands tied and a gag put in my mouth. Then came the arrows and the war-cry of the Natchez. *Monsieur* knows about the fight. Damoan kept close beside me till towards the end. Then the mad Frenchman charged the Indians. Damoan then had to leave me, for his Indians were saying the madman was led by his *manito;* and they would have run away from him if not for the Fox. I got rid of the gag but not the cord. I ran away and found *monsieur*. That is all."

"Poor Monsieur Narbonne!" softly cried *mademoiselle*. "He was a gallant Frenchman."

"He went down gloriously, *mademoiselle*," said Labrador. "He died like a true Mississippian, and he took several with him."

"I hate that word 'Mississippian,'" she shuddered. "This terrible river has been a curse to my people."

"All the more reason why *mademoiselle* should escape from it," Joe gallantly replied.

Narbonne's death affected me strongly. He had made my fight his fight. I could not bring myself to use the friendship of another Frenchman in furthering my schemes; and to Labrador I said—

"Friend Joe, I am an English spy."

"*Eh bien!* Damoan the Fox is not. I prefer you to him. You'll not hurt France, *monsieur*. And perhaps I have spied a bit on the English. Who knows? There was a certain trip far up the Ohio. You have told what you know; I have told things. We are even, and our friendship stands. There is but one thing to remember; you are doing *mademoiselle* a service. I must help. That talk is ended, and the white Wampum still hangs between us."

Six Fingers was sullenly silent. Narbonne's death deprived him of his chance to visit golden Acaanibas. His trend of thought was revealed in his shriveled face as he slowly turned his gaze on the girl. I remembered his talk about a choice between two gold-mines. One was Acaanibas. But how could *mademoiselle* be connected with the second? Friendless and without money how could she attract the cupidity of this old scoundrel? It would have been much better had Narbonne been spared and this doer of evil had fallen.

THAT night I divided the watch with Labrador, and with the first light had more fish cooked and my companions awakened to eat and take to the pirogues. Labrador bolted his ration as he made for a tree on a hill. He returned and reported that he had climbed to the top of the tree and had surveyed those segments of the river showing beyond the forest-crown. He had discovered no signs of the Fox and his warriors. From the shore we could see a long stretch of the lonely waters, and no canoes were in sight.

With Labrador at the paddle in place of poor Narbonne I did not have to hold back, but was hard-pressed to keep out of his way.

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We worked our fastest until midday, when we paused while Labrador slipped ashore and shot a deer. Then on we went for two weary hours when we landed again. I built a fire some distance from the shore in among some rocks and cooked a generous quantity of the meat. I was pleased to see that *mademoiselle* ate the steak with a relish.

To relieve her of Six Fingers' presence I ordered him to take his ration out on a point of rock and keep watch over the lower river. Labrador was the most carefree of the four of us, and essayed his best to lighten the girl's sad mood. Her thoughts were with Narbonne, however, and the sacrifice he had made for her sake. Her mood was not that of melancholy, for that would have been selfish, and she was not thinking of herself. Once I sought to divert her thoughts by asking why she feared Six Fingers.

She scornfully answered:

"That scum of the earth! Let him beware, or I'll have him whipped."

This was high language.

"Then you do not fear him?" I urged.

"Bah! I only fear for what he——"

She came to a stop and eyed me suspiciously. I believed she had started to say she feared him only for what he *knew*. She recovered her composure and signified her readiness to continue the journey.

Late that afternoon we landed again, and once more Labrador climbed a tree. This time he had startling news. Three pirogues, well-filled, were far down the river. We both were satisfied that Damoan had received the reinforcements. We had planned to pass through the portage of the Cross, thus avoiding the immense loop of the Three Channels, but as night was near and the enemy in sight, and inasmuch as we could not hope to keep ahead of the fresh paddlers Damoan always could supply, we went ashore.

We landed some distance below a village of the Tunicas, a fugitive people driven to the land of the Humas by the Chickasaws. Their village numbered only a few cabins. But as Damoan might make inquiry at the village we planned to pass around it and gain a Huma village and remain concealed until it was safe to resume our journey.

Six Fingers rebelled against leaving the river, but Labrador saved me from using him severely by glibly telling stories about the riches apt to be found among the Indians. Among other lies he solemnly declared the Humas hung golden circlets around their ankles and wrists. Six Fingers made no objections after hearing these absurdities. There was a venomous lusting in his eyes as the Canadian elaborated on his first description of the brass ornaments worn by the savages. We concealed the pirogues most skillfully, and I found a well-trodden Indian trail that led inland and would leave no trace of our passing. By good luck—for we were forced to keep to the path or else leave signs easily read by either Choctaws or friendly Tunicas—we cleared the village in a half-circle without encountering a single native.

To make good our isolation from any prowling Choctaws we passed that night in the thick woods, the deer-meat brought along by Labrador doing us for food. Early in the morning I went a short distance from our camp and killed two wild turkeys with a long stick. I had them dressed and on broiling by the time *mademoiselle* in her tiny bark house came out and went to a near-by stream to bathe.

She came back with a new expression illumining her face, something of fresh hope, of a faith in the morrow; the result of getting away from the river, perhaps. She presented such a dainty appearance that Labrador stared at her rapturously until I kicked his foot. And when I stole a glance at her piquant face I could only think of the jessamine and the opening magnolia buds back home.

"Ah, but what do you think, *monsieur*! Eh! But you will find it hard to believe me," she began as she seated herself and waited for me to serve the turkey. "What did I find at the brook?"

Old Six Fingers twisted his claws nervously, and hoarsely whispered:

"Gold? Diamonds?"

She ignored him, and I guessed—

"A red cornstalk, with a fish's head on the top of it."

"A stick with a bear's head on it?" eagerly suggested Labrador. And I had seen both these—the Huma hunters offerings to their god of the chase—on passing the brook when after the turkeys.

"Had I seen the bear's head I should have cried for help and ran. No, no." And now she was serious, and her eyes very earnest as they met mine. "I found my

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faith. The river had all but destroyed it. I found that no woman is to feel despair while honest gentlemen give of their time, give their lives, to help her. I saw a small white cross fastened to a bush; and I found my faith was not dead. I almost believe that sometime—very far away, perhaps—I shall almost be happy. The cross tells me these *sauvages* must be Christians."

"Tonti, or Iberville, left the cross with them," I murmured.

"Ah, that head of a fish!" idiotically murmured Labrador, eying her with idolatry in his gaze.

"Labrador, suppose you scout about us and see if you find any Choctaw signs. We will wait here. Six Fingers, go to the brook and look for a gourd left there by the Indians, and bring me some water."

Six Fingers went willingly enough, his belief in gold to be found in running streams making the errand most welcome. Labrador was loath to depart, but *mademoiselle* gave him a smile to carry with him, and he plunged into the thicket. Now we two were alone she grew restrained in her manner, almost as if wishing at least Labrador was back with us.

For three years I had followed the river with but few glimpses of white women except as I saw them in Canada or on the Gulf. And many of these, especially those on the Gulf, were without sex in my eyes, so desperate had been Beau Law's company to secure colonists. Before me sat *mademoiselle*, cross-legged like an Indian squaw, yet ravishingly enticing in her appeal. Her demure youth held the threat of coquetry, once spontaneous fires were kindled in her heart. Notwithstanding all this what I proposed saying was in no way meant to take any advantage of her position, but was prompted by an impulse to shield her after she reached Virginia. And unless some honorable man should thus shield her she would encounter torments of the spirit that would weigh more heavily on her soul than the transient physical perils of the great river.

Without any preamble I said:

"*Mademoiselle*, when you reach the English settlements questions will be asked you. You can not avoid them. You can scarcely escape answering them. Your position will be unpleasant. Do you care to tell me just what you propose doing?"

"I will work," she muttered, staring down at the ground and digging her slim fingers into the forest-mold.

"That will not relieve you of the questions—for you are French in spite of your Danish name. Work is honorable, but in the English colonies slaves do the work, or indentured servants. Work is honorable for a wife, however."

"I am not a wife," she softly said.

"You shall be, if you care to say the word," I promptly declared. "Nay, do not be alarmed. I shall never bring this matter up again. I make you this offer to relieve your mind of any anxiety. As my wife you will not be questioned, nor will you have to labor with slaves and indentured servants."

Up came her head, her gaze haughtily returning mine. In a low even voice she coldly informed me:

"When I found my faith at the brook, I also found some of my pride. *Monsieur* has made a great mistake."

"I am afraid I have," I muttered, dazed by the unexpected outcome of what cool reason would tell me was an unwise honor.

But what the —— had pride to do with it? In a rush of memory I saw her standing wan and friendless on the sands of Ship Island. I remembered her misrepresentation of how she came to sail for Louisiana. I recalled my conviction that soft hands and poverty were a poor dower for a girl to bring to one not assured as to her history. And I thought of my people and my aristocratically inclined little sister. And I had actually offered her marriage under the spell of the morning and because of a vagrant impulse to complete her belief in her medicine—her faith.

She was coolly saying:

"*Monsieur* forgot himself. I also will forget. He meant to be kind; so his fault is amiable. I will see that *monsieur* is well-paid for his time and worry and the dangers he encounters. He shall be paid in gold. I am without money just now. I may choose to demean myself by labor. But—but I always pay my debts."

I knew two things as she uttered this preposterous talk—she was adorable, regardless of her past history; and she deserved to be slapped. I rose and bowed, and said:

"It is all forgotten. If in anything I have said or done I have impressed you as one who would help a helpless woman for

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so many pieces of gold or silver then you shall pay me. If you decide to the contrary you will never mention the pay again. If I was crazy to speak as I did, really, *mademoiselle*, you were out of character to talk of compensation. As we English put it, we are quits. I only ask that during the rest of the trip neither of us be foolish enough to remember this talk to be embarrassed by it."

She frowned, as if puzzled by my words, then gave a little shrug to show she dismissed the whole matter. I began talking about the country ahead and explaining my plans, and she readily responded, questioning me with the quick directness of a child. But in the back of my mind was the amazing fact that I had offered to marry her, to extricate her from a hundred and one humiliations, let alone dangers, and had been coldly refused because of "pride."

Calmer reasoning told me I was too severe in my reasoning, and that her quality of pride could be beautiful, and that she was not to be won by an off-hand offer no matter how perilous might be her plight. For it is ever a woman's prerogative to lead a long chase before surrendering, and therein, perhaps, is contained the chief charm of love-making. However, the ridiculous incident was closed, and I had learned to be more circumspect in case I ever found the right woman and went wooing in earnest.

Labrador returned and reported:

"If Damoan visited the Tunica village he has not left it. No Choctaws have traveled inland from the river."

Old Six Fingers came cursing his way through the bushes, and snarled at me:

"No gold, no diamonds, and no —— gourd. So you get no water."

The last with much ugly satisfaction.

"Then we will move on and find the Huma village. I will scout ahead and see if they will lift the peace calumet. Labrador, hold back with *mademoiselle* until you get my signal to come on."

"A moment, Monsieur Brampton," she sharply demanded.

Then to Labrador, "Just what does Monsieur Brampton mean by 'lift the peace calumet'?"

And before I could stop him he had blurted out:

"He goes to see if it is safe for us to enter the village. If they do not lift the pipe—then I have lost my best friend, and *mademoiselle* has lost——"

She did not wait to learn what she would lose, but placed herself before me and haughtily commanded:

"We will go together, or not at all. One brave gentleman has lost his life to serve me. Now we will all share alike."

She was as regal as a marquise in hauteur, and the tilt of the small head was suggestive of one used to authority.

"It must be as I say," I told her. "But there will be no danger. Fear nothing because of me."

Instantly her mood changed, and she was clinging to my arm, and tearfully pleading:

"Let me go with you, *monsieur*. I beg of you to let me go with you."

I glanced sidewise at the lowering Six Fingers and murmured:

"He can harm you none. He is dependent on me for his very life. Besides you will have my friend."

"And you thought I was thinking of myself!" she sadly remarked, turning away.

With an order to Labrador—in Choctaw—to hold her back if I received a hostile welcome, I hurried up the path to the Huma village. Half an hour was sufficient to bring me to the ten-foot stockade surrounding the village. At the entrance on a stake was an empty brandy bottle, the gift of some Frenchman, and now proudly exhibited as the village's offering to its *manito*. There was loud singing inside the stockade and I remained at the edge of the forest, wondering what could occasion it so early in the morning; for singing meant some ceremony.

Now and then a Huma, naked except for his breechclout of mulberry fiber, would emerge from the woods and eagerly hurry through the gate. One, a returned hunter, was so anxious to gain the village that he almost blundered into me and passed within a few feet of me without discovering my presence. Through the opening in the stockade I glimpsed young warriors, very gay in their clinking metal ornaments and headdresses of red and white and yellow feathers, doing some ceremonial dance.

When these ceased their prancing steps their place was taken by a line of maidens, each waving a fan of feathers. Evidently something of importance had happened, or was about to happen, and I would have

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preferred seeking sanctuary there when the savages were not overrun by their emotions. But to camp in the forest another day, without being discovered by Tunica or Huma, was out of the question.

To be found lurking outside of the village would place us at a great disadvantage, and, if such be the Humas' whim, classify us as captives. Nor could we retreat to the river where Damoan and his Choctaws would have but little trouble in gobbling us up. So, assuming my best air, I advanced and came face to face with a warrior just inside the gate. He was placing pieces of tobacco around a cross erected near the gate, probably a memento of Tonti's visit when he came down the Mississippi to find La Salle.

His face was heavily streaked with red and yellow paint, and a white circle inclosing his chin and extending up to both ears gave him the appearance of wearing a grotesque mask.

We stared at each other a moment, then his paint-covered face cracked in a smile, and he extended a hand, and said:

"My white brother is welcome. The White Indian has a red heart when he is with the Humas."

I doubted if he would have given me this compliment had he known of the Sharp Claw, of kindred blood, done to death at Pascagoula Bay, and of the other Choctaws who had fallen in the fighting along the river. I had been among Indians enough to distinguish them as individuals, just as I would white men, and as I held his hand I remembered him, *sans* paint, and replied—

"The White Indian comes to renew his red heart with Little Turkey and his people and to smoke the calumet with Strong Bow."

Strong Bow was head chief of the Humas, and a very old man if he still lived. I had smoked with him the year before and I was anxious to find him in the flesh and ruling his people. He was one of the few savages who showed the flat forehead, as the custom of head-flattening was no longer practised by the tribe.

To my relief Little Turkey said:

"Strong Bow is now in his cabin after seeing the dance. He has smoked the calumet once this morning, but he is never too weary to lift the pipe to the White Indian."

He turned and walked away, and I followed him.

Those of the dancers who had not dispersed to their cabins eyed me with lively curiosity, but did not crowd around me and display those impertinences so common to the Sioux and Canadian Indians. Some have claimed that the courtesy of the French taught these savages the niceties of manner, but I hold they had their manners before they ever saw a Frenchman; for no amount of politeness on the part of the Canadian French had added polish to the Pottawatomies and other northern tribes.

We had an open path to the chief's cabin, which was built of posts, plastered with clay. Split canes formed the roof. Outside the opening was a raised platform on which were piled bearskins and hides. Through the entrance I saw Strong Bow reclining on a couch of skins and cane mats. On the earthern floor squatted a squaw, busily brushing the flies away from her aged lord.

A young warrior, a grandson of the chief I later learned, stood at the foot of the couch, his girdle of colored feathers hanging down like a tail. This young man, on beholding me, backed from the couch, scattering half a dozen chickens in frantic flight, and, in what was a most indecorous deportment for an Indian, turned and bolted through the door. Little Turkey glared after him reproachfully.

Strong Bow did not seem to notice his grandson's ill manners. He sat up and motioned the squaw away. Then he threw a chain of beads and copper bangles around his scrawny neck and fussily made sure his wrist ornaments were in place. I squatted on the floor, and the two of us stared at the beaten earth for nearly a minute.

Then the chief said:

"The White Indian does not forget the red (Huma) Choctaws. He brings presents to them and he is always welcome."

"He comes to make sure the fire is burning in the peace calumet for himself and his friends; then he gives presents," I replied. "I see the maize and beans have grown poorly around the village. I know game is scarce unless the Humas go far for it. They must have guns and powder. I come with friends to learn how many guns the Humas need. Another time I shall bring them."

"The White Indian's tongue speaks two things," gravely reproached the chief.

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"It says he has brought presents. It says he will bring presents. I like the trail which leads straight."

This was his back-handed way of calling me a liar. To overcome the prejudice I replied:

"On my last visit I brought presents and took nothing but your friendship. That was enough. Today I bring Strong Bow a present and promise more when I come again."

"The clouds pass from the sun. All is easy to be seen. The White Indian is our friend. I will have my present now."

"The chief of the red Choctaws forgets that gifts follow the peace calumet," I reminded. "It would be poor manners to teach the young warrior who has just left us."

The last scored, for it showed I had appreciated the young man's breach of etiquette, a very serious offense in the estimation of a red man.

Anxious to receive his gift he motioned for Little Turkey to bring the peace calumet from its peg on a post. Little Turkey brought it and filled and gave it to the chief and then brought a coal from the fire in a split stick. Strong Bow did me the great courtesy of passing the pipe to me and lighting it for me.

"I smoke for three friends, all white like myself," I stipulated, before taking the first puff.

"They must be ghosts. I do not see them," he remarked, his wrinkled face absolutely blank of expression.

"My feet are swift like the deer's. I was so hungry to meet my red friends I drew ahead of them. They will be along soon." And I waited for him to include my friends in the smoke before putting the stem to my lips.

"The pipe is lifted to the White Indian and his three friends," he gravely agreed.

Then I smoked to the sun and the four winds and the earth and passed the pipe to him, and, not to be outdone in courtesy, held it while he repeated the sacred obligation.

After the pipe had been hung on the post the chief said—

"It is the second peace I have smoked since the sun began shining."

Little Turkey had said the same and a faint apprehension of danger disturbed me. I was keen to inquire who his first visitor was, but this would be a grave social blunder. So I produced one of my pistols, the one that missed fire in the river-fight—due to the flint dropping out—and placed it on his couch. With a grunt of delight he seized upon the weapon, which was of large bore and generously decorated with silver. Little Turkey touched my arm to intimate the audience was ended. I followed him into the sunshine, and he said:

"My white brother's friends should come now. The smoke of a peace pipe covers those who can see, or smell it."

"They will be here soon," I assured him. "The smoke covers them. It was agreed that I smoked for the three of them. Little Turkey knows they are under the smoke just as much as though they had been in the cabin and had held the stem between their lips."

"It is true," he agreed.

He remained silent for half a minute staring toward the entrance in the stockade. I sensed his desire to be friendly; I was convinced he would aid me if it lay in his power. I feared there would soon be an occasion when I should need help; and yet I did not dare bluntly question him as I would a white man.

"They smoked when you smoked," he finally remarked. "But old men sometimes forget. It is easier for them to forget if an evil bird whispers in their ear."

He had given me a friendly warning. To ask him to interpret and go into details would have been useless. I knew he was my friend just as I knew the young warrior seen in the chief's cabin would be my enemy. I watched his immobile face. It contained much of dignity despite the smears of paint. I observed the slight straightening of his figure and a flash of his eyes in a sidelong glance. I looked to one side and beheld Damoan the Fox and a group of warriors approaching us. The chief's grandson had informed my enemy of my presence, for he stood at Damoan's right hand and was pointing at me.

Among the Humas were several of Damoan's Choctaws; and with his hand on a pistol thrust through his sash the Fox gave a sharp order. The Biloxi Choctaws darted forward, but Little Turkey, already sensing the hostility between the Frenchman and me, leaped before the Choctaws and flung up his right hand, and cried—

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"They have smoked!"

The Choctaws fell back. Damoan cursed in French and ordered them to seize me. But even his new ally, the chief's grandson, dared not see the peace of the pipe violated, and began remonstrating with him. I heard him remind the Fox that the stem of the peace calumet did not extend beyond the stockade; in plain English, once outside the palings we could fight to our heart's desire and the savages would enjoy watching the spectacle. But the village inside the stockade, like the Cherokee "white" towns, was sanctuary, and those who had been received in peace could not be disturbed.

With the first flush of anger succeeded by cold reason Damoan knew the uselessness of opposing this ancient custom of the Humas. And had he given further orders to his Choctaws they would not have obeyed him. I could not be game for their axes until outside the enclosure.

With his thumbs hooked in his red sash he swaggered up to me, and quietly greeted—

"So, English spy, I've caught you at last."

"French spy, you mean you have caught up with me," I corrected. "And you caught up with me in the house of Sieur de Bienville. Much good that meeting did you. I left you on the floor, I remember. What did his Excellency say when you told him how you lost the papers?"

He smiled in his sleepy fashion. It seemed incredible that this man, so inexorable in his purpose to destroy me, once had been my close friend and confidant.

"I did not tell his Excellency about the papers," he softly replied. "I satisfied him you were a spy. When I take your head to Biloxi I will take what papers you may have on you. He will never know I had them and lost them."

"I believe I can send him the talking-bark before I die, explaining how you were overcome like a boy."

"Write your message now and give it to me to deliver. There will be no other chance of it being delivered."

"And where are the rest of your red friends—aside from those feeding the catfish in the river?"

He showed his teeth in a thin-lipped grin and informed me:

"Outside, hunting for your friends. No pipes have been smoked out there. I told them not to hurt the woman. I think I shall keep her."

He desired to enrage me into an imprudence, so he might shoot me in the plea of self-defense. As I did not rise to the bait he resumed:

"I came here to smoke the calumet and get some red trackers. I never dreamed of this good luck. My *manito* is very strong. I knew you had landed, for there were scraps of meat and bones on a rock in the river, where your lookout had eaten."

I mentally cursed old Six Fingers for leaving the signs, although I was the more to blame for not looking after him.

"*Eh bien, canaille;* we have emptied our talk-bag. When we meet again there will be no calumet stem between us."

"Nothing but red wampum. But wait. *Tiens!* You would miss the best of it. You will find it droll."

And from the medicine-bag at his girdle—for in some Indian superstitions he equaled the red man—he took out a green scalp and shook out the long, blonde hair. Switching it close to my face he said, "A souvenir of the crazy Frenchman!"

My heart pumped tumultuously; but my face was frozen in its calm expression as I asked—

"Who counted that coup?"

"One of my men knifed him. I took the hair. The fools were afraid to take the scalp because of their belief he was under the protection of a great *manito*."

"I do not hold it against the Choctaws, but because you took his hair I will lift your scalp some day, Damoan."

He laughed with much gusto and patted his medicine-bag.

"But remember what I say, Damoan," I repeated. "I shall have your scalp. My *manito* tells me you will be bald-headed before the Moon of Turkeys (October)."

He continued laughing, but now his hate showed through his mirth.

"Fool! Baldhead yourself! I will keep the woman till she tires me, and I will decorate her leggings with the hair of the mad Frenchman and with that of the White Indian—one scalp for each legging."

At this grossness my gorge boiled over, and despite the calumet I would have attacked him had I not been confounded by a fresh situation; nothing less than the appearance of Mademoiselle Dahlsgaarde

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running into the village closely followed by Labrador and Six Fingers. Naturally believing that Damoan's Choctaws had flushed them from their hiding-place and were hot on their trail and that at any moment they would be pouring into the stockade, eager to kill because of their ignorance of the peace smoke, I ran to meet the girl.

Damoan must have also started forward, for I heard Little Turkey's raucous voice proclaiming:

"They are in the peace smoke. Strong Bow held the stem over the three when he smoked with the White Indian. Let no one forget the shadow of the peace calumet."

I glanced back and observed the Humas had glided in between Damoan and his Choctaws and me. The next moment the girl had both my hands, and was crying:

"Oh, *monsieur!* I felt you were in danger. They tried to stop me. When they were not looking I ran up the path. Thank the good God you still live!"

"As *mademoiselle* is to see much of me, Monsieur Brampton, suppose you present me to her," suavely suggested Damoan at my elbow.

The girl stared at him wonderingly; then began to shrink behind me to escape his evil gaze. She was guessing some of the truth of the climax; and as it was best that she should understand all I bowed to her, and said—

"Mademoiselle Dahlsgaarde, this is the Devil."

CHAPTER XI

"GOOD LACK! THIS WILL BE DEATH!"

I HURRIED her to a cabin where she could be alone with two Huma women and took up my quarters with Six Fingers and Labrador in an adjacent cabin. Labrador was the first to speak, declaring:

"The Fox must never go back to report to Sieur de Bienville. *Ma foi!* But what a price his Excellency would place on my head if he knew I was with you! Bayou St. Jean, *adieu!*"

"Scuttle me! But what's to stop these red bullies from boarding us now?" anxiously demanded Six Fingers, referring to the Biloxi Choctaws in the village.

"We will not be molested while in the village," I assured them. "I have smoked for all of you."

"Aye? Then God bless the pipe!" growled Six Fingers with much relief in his voice. "One can cruise about a bit if he keeps his bearings?"

"If you leave the stockade they'll have your hair on a pole inside of five minutes."

"I'll not get into shoal water," he muttered. "But we're landlocked here. Where's the channel? And when do we up with our hooks and sail?"

"I'll find the channel before night. We must get away tonight if it is possible."

He thrust his scrawny neck out of the opening and became absorbed in watching the men and women passing back and forth.

"Blow me and beach me," I heard him softly exclaim. Then, without turning his head: "Shipmate Labrador, you spoke by the Book. The beggars are loaded with gold!"

Labrador grinned at me because of the fellow's ignorance in mistaking brass and copper for the precious metal. Six Fingers grew bolder and walked outside and toward the girl's cabin.

To Labrador I said:

"There will be a big feast tonight. *Mademoiselle* will not attend. You and Six Fingers leave the feast when I give the signal and take her to the river and start up-stream in a pirogue. Make for the Natchez village. I will overtake you. During the day we will plan just how you are to get outside the village without going through the gate."

"Ha! That Natchez village! I do not want to go there, my friend. They have promised war against the French."

"As my friend you will be safe. Tell Tattooed Serpent I sent you."

"Bah! I do not care for their threats of war. There is another reason. It is a woman."

"So you have been philandering. Yet they forgive. She has another man by this time."

"*Ma foi!* But she is a noble. And she is my wife."

Now the women of the Natchez, while single, were grossly below any standard of morality as measured by the white man's civilization; but once they married they became patterns of virtue. What the white race would consider a demerit was held to be a virtue by the Natchez, as it was by parting with chastity that the Natchez woman accumulated her marriage-dower. The nobles could not marry within their order, and many of the women refused to marry the

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lower class, or commoners. To find a French husband was an excellent way of escaping a union with the inferior class. It would follow that Labrador's wife would be true to him and was waiting for him to return.

"If she had only been one of the *canaille!* But no! I must look to a noble, and they have long memories."

"Then you really are married to her?"

"That is the worst of it," he sighed.

His was the price many *coureurs de bois* paid to the wilderness. Many the adventurer who took an Indian wife, believing it to be but a transient arrangement, only to find the bronze chains could hold as tightly as those of the town. Many the woods-runner who started an affair only to find himself sentenced for life to the cabin of a red woman.

I suggested the possibility of my overtaking him before he and *mademoiselle* reached the village, which would permit him to pass by and wait for me somewhere above Fort Rosalie.

"Ah, those Natchez!" he softly exclaimed. "So different from all other Indians with their sacred fire of walnut-wood burning forever in their temples. No, no, *monsieur;* I will not hide. She is my wife. I have taken no other. I will take *mademoiselle* to the village and you will follow when you can. My friend, I was sad to have *mademoiselle* know I had wooed a red woman. But it is nothing."

Then he was inspired to add:

"But why not let me stay here while you take *mademoiselle.* She would wish you for her guide. She was a young wild-cat when we tried to stop her from entering the village before you gave the word."

"I am the one Damoan must capture or kill. Every one else, even *mademoiselle,* comes second in his plans. He will not leave the feast so long as I am there. It must be as I say. Wander about the village and use your wits in looking for a loophole. Get into no trouble and be back here within an hour. I will talk with *mademoiselle.*"

On leaving the cabin, I observed many of the men were absent, doubtless after game for the night's feasting. At first I saw nothing of Damoan, simply because I was looking wide, whereas I should have looked close. He was within twenty feet of me, but a bit behind me; and it was the girl's voice that drew my attention to him. I heard her indignantly cry out:

"Beast! Go away!"

I wheeled and beheld him at the entrance of her cabin, his cap off, his thin features grinning diabolically. He had pushed the Indian women aside. *Mademoiselle* stood in the opening, her small dirk in hand, her boyish figure drawn very erect as she gave him his name and his orders.

"The peace smoke does not forbid us becoming friends," he told her.

And with a snake-like movement his hand seized her wrist and wrenched the dirk loose. He was drawing her to him when my two hands caught his left wrist and throat.

He dropped her wrist to tear my hand loose, for thumb and fingers were sinking deep into the bronzed neck and causing his mouth to pop open most quaintly. Once she was free I pushed him from me so as to escape the temptation of ending him then and there. He went down on his back and came to his feet like a cat, an ax in one hand, a pistol in the other. My own pistol was out, and surely the sacred peace calumet would have received a most grievous affront had not Strong Bow, followed by his grandson, rushed between us. Notwithstanding his age-shrunken figure, withered face, and flattened forehead, the old fellow presented a fine picture of outraged dignity as he stood between us and fiercely demanded:

"What does this mean, white men? You fight in a peace smoke?"

"He attacked the white woman. I threw him from her cabin," I explained.

Damoan had been inarticulate with rage, but he was not called the Fox without good cause. If impulsive in his anger there was shrewd reason at the back of his hot mind; and by a mighty effort he recovered his balance, and, replacing his weapons, said:

"There is nothing in the peace smoke to stop me speaking to the white woman. She is of my people. This man seized me from behind, I feared for my life. I shall not break the peace in this village."

"If he troubles the white woman again I shall kill him," I told the chief.

"If either of you break the Huma peace with blood I will put that man on the high platform and my young men shall build little fires on his naked body," calmly

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warned the chief. "If the blood between you is so bad why not go outside the village? Then only one will come back to claim the woman, and all will be well."

"I will go with him outside the village," I promptly offered; for it was an excellent chance to be rid of him.

Damoan's eyes glittered; and I believed he was to accept my challenge. Nor was it cowardice that deterred him. We had had too many forest affairs together in the old days for me to ever call him coward. To the chief he said:

"I am sent here by Iron Hand to bring this man's head back to Biloxi. I wish he were two men, so I could fight and kill one, and take the other's head down the river. But I must obey my master. I must make sure of killing him. I have Choctaws with me to make sure of the killing. I would be a fool to run into danger and disobey my master."

This frank statement did not prejudice him any in the Indian mind. Why, indeed, run the risk of losing a life when a little patience might mean success without any loss? Such was the Indian reasoning, and it always was applied among the lower valley tribes when on the war-path; for their war-chiefs were held accountable for all men lost. I have often wondered if there would not have been far less waste of blood and treasure if the European wars overlapping into the new world had been waged with a similar responsibility attached to leadership.

"Iron Hand is a hard master," agreed Strong Bow. "You would be a fool not to use the warriors you brought with you. But remember, white men, the slow fires for him who makes the peace *manito* in the Huma pipe angry."

With this final warning he departed, accompanied by his grandson.

To Damoan I said—

"If I find you near this cabin again I shall break the peace by breaking your neck."

He recovered his evil jauntiness, and as he moved off he told me over his shoulder:

"When I come to the cabin again I shall stay. *Mademoiselle* will be without her man and will be glad to see me."

This was spoken in French so that the girl might understand.

She was very pale and the bosom of her blouse rose and fell with spasmodic rapidity. Yet her voice was low and even as she said:

"I blame the terrible river for that creature. God must have despaired of this country and left it unfinished for the brutes to enjoy."

"*Mademoiselle* should not mind the ravings of a dead man," I soothed.

"Dead?" she ejaculated.

"The same as dead. His days are numbered and are very few. I have promised him that."

And I picked up her dirk and returned it to her.

She stared down at the naked dagger held in her open hand and said:

"You must run no risk. What do we do next?"

I briefly repeated the orders I had given to Labrador and Six Fingers and told her I would work out the details during the day. As I had anticipated she immediately interposed objections. She would go nowhere with Six Fingers unless I was present. Labrador's company made no difference. She would not leave the village unless in my company.

"But I will overtake you," I insisted. "It is most important that I reach Virginia with the least possible delay. I shall not waste any time in following you."

"And if not for me you would already be well on your way there," she murmured, still staring down at the venomous little dagger. I took it from her hand and slipped it into its sheath and motioned for her to restore it to her blouse. As she did this and found the blouse open at the throat, disarranged by her frantic haste to arm herself against the Fox, the pallor of her face was enlivened with blushes. Here was a modesty seldom found in an immigrant sent out by the Company of the Indies!

"I shall get to Virginia in good time and shall take you along with me," I promised her. "You are perfectly safe here in the village. Damoan is a sad rascal——"

"You spoke true when you called him the Devil!" she fiercely interrupted. "I looked into his eyes and saw a dog of hell in each."

"He will not come here again."

"Until you are dead!"

"Which shall not be until I have lived out my years. I was in greater danger at Biloxi, when I was prisoner of Sieur de

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Bienville, who is a gentleman. When I escaped from Biloxi I left Damoan, half-throttled, behind me. I was in much danger at Pascagoula Bay, with no breathing time allowed. Yet I am here among the Humas."

"And then there was the dreadful river, the naked *sauvages* swimming in the night like foul water-monsters! The fight at the little waterway, where poor Monsieur Narbonne died gallantly! Oh, *monsieur*, you are very brave! I wish I could have told you different when you spoke to me of your heart!"

Her naïveté in bringing up what I supposed to be most strongly forbidden caused my mind to swirl in confusion. I could only mumble—

"We were not to speak of that again."

She further bewildered me, as, with the innocence of a child, she corrected me:

"Not for you to speak of, of course. But surely it is for me to speak of when I wish." Then sympathetically, "And does it hurt *monsieur* too much if I speak of it?"

"I think it does," I promptly answered, beginning to feel very uneasy. "Yes; I am quite sure."

"Then it must not be mentioned," she sighed. "I did not fully understand. I only wanted *monsieur* to know I regretted."

"It is all ended. You will be ready to go with my friend?"

With a flash of humor she glanced down at her Indian skirt and leggings, and replied:

"I have not much to get ready. Yes, I will go."

I bowed and backed from the opening. She followed me a few paces, and I was disturbed to see she was fighting to control some violent emotion. I refrained from looking at her further and would have gone on, but she detained me by gently calling—

"*Monsieur.*"

"Yes, Mademoiselle Dahlsgaarde."

"If I knew I was never to see you again there is something."

"Yes? Something?"

"Something I think I should say."

My curiosity prickled; for she was such a mixture of enigmas that one could never guess where her words would land. I had seen her as haughty as a marquise, and in the next moment displaying the ingenuousness of a child. She was not quite real to me yet in any rôle; more as if I were lugging around at much inconvenience a beautiful dream. When she was in her *grande dame* mood it was easy to be blunt and inquisitorial. Now she typed extreme youth and an entire lack of worldly wisdom. So conscience stifled curiosity, and I declared:

"But you will see me again. Tonight. On the river. My leaving this place is nothing. There will be a feast. Damoan will be there to watch me. His Indians will be there to help him. That gives you a free road. When I decide you have made a good start for the river I shall laugh at them and leave."

"*Merci, monsieur,*" she stiffly said. "You have saved me from an indiscretion. I have all confidence in your confidence."

And yet, as I walked away, there was the temptation to go back and ask her to tell what she had withheld. I tried to blame my interest in her shifting moods to my long withdrawal from civilization and its types of dainty womanhood. This, in defense of my peace of mind. The sight of Damoan leaving the stockade in company with the chief's grandson helped me to tear my thoughts from the girl and concentrate on the grim problem of the night. For notwithstanding my assurance in talking with *mademoiselle* I had no idea just how I was to escape that night. In pursuit of an inspiration I visited Strong Bow's cabin and tried to pump him concerning the Natchez war-threat against the French.

"The Natchez have been listening to the Chickasaws, who love the English. But the Natchez are not fools," said Strong Bow. "They will never dig up the ax against our great French father. Tattooed Serpent, their head war-chief, learned his lesson from Iron Hand four Summers ago. How long does the White Indian and his friends stay in the Huma village?"

"A few sleeps. When the woman's feet get strong we shall go."

"Before the Moon of Peaches the smoke peace must be renewed."

This ill-omened declaration came with the abruptness of a clap of thunder. That the chief's mind was deeply concerned over the problem of keeping Damoan and me from shedding each other's blood was shown by his making his statement without first leading up to it with long-winded preliminaries. In giving his announcement he spoke as a white man would speak.

"If it is not renewed?"

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"Then it grows weak. There may be blood on the Peach Moon."

I understood the situation. Strong Bow had wanted me to understand it. Damoan had been urging a limit to our protection from the peace smoke. Strong Bow did not dare to affront Bienville, and the Fox was the governor's "word-bearer."

The Fox had refreshed the old chief's recollection of Bienville's summary treatment of the Natchez when they refused to give up the slayers of some French traders. Perhaps he reminded the chief of how the governor had reduced the Tchanhie from three hundred families to eighty because they had killed a missionary and three Frenchmen.

Then there was his bloody justice meted out to the Tawasa for killing a Chickasaw, the punishment inflicted on the Choctaws for murdering two of the Chakchiuma, the head demanded from the Mobilians for killing a Tawasa. There was no denying the impartiality of Bienville's justice. He was entitled to wear the names the Indian gave him, which were interpreted to mean "The Arrow of Uprightness," and "The Tomahawk of Justice." Nevertheless, the chief wished to be fair with me and avoid any violation of the peace pact.

Nor would Damoan seek to have him break the peace. Rather, he had shown him how to accommodate Bienville without breaking faith with me. So I was told that the village would afford me no sanctuary after the Moon of Watermelons ended unless it be renewed. Before it could be renewed Damoan would strike. Bienville would be satisfied and the *manito* in the calumet would not be offended. Already the chief's grandson was hand and heart with the Frenchman.

We talked a bit on things that do not matter, and I left him. As I wandered toward my cabin I found myself walking just ahead of Little Turkey, who softly called to me—

"Do not look around, white man."

I kept my eyes to the front and slowed my steps. After a few moments he was saying:

"There is a big feast tonight. We feed the ghosts of all our warriors killed since the last Moon of Bears (December). We offer food to the *manito* in the pipe."

Another dozen feet and he was continuing:

"Our *alikchi* (medicine-man) finds the spirit in the pipe is very hungry. It will take much feasting to keep him strong; and the crops are poor and the game is hard to find."

With that he changed his course and left me walking alone. He had repeated Strong Bow's warning, speaking vaguely, but believing I would understand. If the pipe was very hungry and there was not enough food to feed it after the ghosts were fed it would follow the peace emanating from the pipe would be weak. Working through the chief's grandson, as I believed, Damoan had influenced the medicine-man to pave the way for our slaughter during the brief interval between the ending of the present peace and the beginning of the new. This procedure would avoid violating the tribe's ancient law.

On reaching the cabin I found Labrador waiting for me. His dark face was anxious, and he asked—

"Where is that old pirate?"

"I thought he was with you."

He shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"Ah, that old pirate! He was with me. At my heels. Then, *pouf!* He was gone. —— snatch him! I have walked and walked around this cursed death-trap, peeping into every cabin, and he is not."

I resigned myself philosophically to Six Fingers' disappearance. If he was gone then that was an end of one of *mademoiselle's* worries. I remembered seeing Damoan leaving the village. I began to suspect his going was a part of the game to catch Six Fingers out of bounds and do him to death. It was while I was explaining this to Labrador that Six Fingers entered the cabin and stood grinning at us in a peculiar manner. It was peculiar in that he tried to appear at ease and did not succeed.

"Back again? Where have you been?" I demanded.

"Adrift," he coolly answered. "I grew tired of this ——'s cage. The women interested me for a bit, but they blacken their teeth, and when they smiled I ran. I went outside."

"You are lucky to be back alive. What is the matter with you? Your legs and arms are wet."

"I went to a brook and washed."

"How did you go without my seeing you, little spider?" asked Labrador.

Six Fingers chuckled.

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"It was as simple as sailing into the wind. In the fence back of *mademoiselle's* cabin is a hole. It is covered from sight by vines. I saw a fowl enter the vines. She did not come back. I cruised inshore and cast the lead. I found the hole. Labrador, the big pig, was sailing before the wind. I slipped through the hole and went to the brook. And here I am, all safe and sound."

"Yet you are lucky," I warned. "Damoan and his Choctaws have been outside all the morning."

This washed the grin from his wrinkled face.

"May he spend a million years on Tortuga with only brimstone to drink," he grated. "But he didn't see me. I am back. No one saw me come in through the hole."

I was not satisfied with Six Fingers' explanation of his excursion outside the stockade. He valued his worthless life too much to risk it for the sake of a swim. He and dirt were no strangers. He impressed me as being sincere in wishing the discomforts of —— for Damoan, but how could I know that he had not met my enemy outside the village and had made a compact with him? Narbonne was dead, and there was no possible chance to continue the quest for Acaanibas. I could not seriously believe that *mademoiselle* interested him any beyond his natural desire to torment the weak and, perhaps, extort some drink-money from her. But extortion meant a knowledge of matters she wished to keep secret; and I could conceive of no secrets which he could share with the girl. I dismissed the matter, apparently, but when he stepped outside to wander about the village I warned Labrador—

"Say nothing to Six Fingers about to-night's plan."

"Ah, you do not trust him!"

And he began drawing his long knife. I made him put it up, and insisted that our man might be perfectly loyal; but I confessed his story did not ring true. "There was a look in his eyes that tells me he is trying to hide something from us," I said.

"When I start with *mademoiselle* tonight I shall give him no chance to spoil the plan. Of course we shall go through the hole in the stockade?"

"Of course. And I will keep Six Fingers with me. He frightens the girl."

At midday I went to *mademoiselle's* cabin and called her out and informed her of the hole in the palings and warned her to be ready to leave by means of it.

"You are determined not to go with me?" she asked.

"If I planned that way none of us could go. I shall be right behind you. I will keep Six Fingers with me. Save some of your supper to take with you."

She was relieved to know Six Fingers was not to accompany her.

"What of the Indian women who keep watch here?" she asked.

"If they do not go to the feasting Labrador will get rid of them. Nothing will be suspected so long as I am at the feast."

"You are sacrificing yourself," she fiercely insisted.

"I am running no risk," I retorted. "I am safe until I leave the village. It is you who runs the risk. But you are a brave little woman and will not fail yourself, I know."

"I will not fail *you, monsieur,*" she whispered.

There remained nothing now but to wait until evening. Owing to the brief time allowed for preparations the hunters could not roam very far, and some of these were returning continually, usually with strings of small game. I tried to get some rest against the exertions of the night, but each returning hunter was greeted with much shouting, and sleep was impossible. When a hunter brought in a deer there was enough howling and dancing to have marked the return of a successful war-party. I rose from the couch and went to the door where Labrador was sitting, his eyes on the girl's cabin, and a most forlorn expression on his face.

"Down-hearted?" I queried.

"Ah, that Natchez wife! *Nom d'une pipe!* But that is a red sun!"

So it was; much like the red sun the Mattors and I sailed after when we escaped from Pascagoulas Bay. However, I was not superstitious, for I had seen many a red sun sink into the forest-tops without bringing blood. Labrador was more imaginative, and his way of steadily staring at the scarlet disc told me he was finding an evil omen in it. While we stood there Six Fingers came along, his old face lively with its expression of mystery. There was both elation and fear in his gaze; and there was much nervousness in the way his skinny

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talons fumbled with the handle of his knife.

"Why wait for this feast before getting underway?" he anxiously asked. "Can't we warp out now?"

"And be killed before you can make ten rods from the stockade," I said.

"—— these savages! Wish I had 'em on blue water. They'd feed the sharks from the loose end of a greased plank," he snarled. "But if we must wait I'll whistle for a black night." He went inside, muttering and mumbling; and finally began croaking:

"Low down, hull down,
We're off, for Portobello-O!
Rum and blood, and the Isthmus mud
Bury many a fellow-O."

But this time there was none of the old gloating in his infernal singing; rather, he gave it mournfully, as one recalling a pleasing experience while in the clutch of melancholy. He seemed in his mood like an old bird fortelling impending trouble.

"He's bad in his heart. He hears his master whispering to him. He'll be up to tricks tonight," muttered Labrador in a hoarse tone.

Possibly it was the anticipation of presenting the Natchez woman to *mademoiselle* as Madame Labrador that caused his usually high spirits to remain at a low level; or it might have been some sinister sign in the sun which was sinking like a huge ball of blood.

TO BE CONCLUDED

"WHILE SHE REMAINED ABOVE GROUND"

by Lewis Appleton Barker

SOON after the Peace of Paris, in 1763, Major Philip K. Skene—of the British Army and retired on half-pay—who had served in the French and Indian War, purchased several soldiers' grants, located in Washington County, New York, near the southern point of Lake Champlain. He procured in addition a royal patent, and effected a small settlement, naming it Skenesborough. He was a Crown Magistrate, owned black slaves, and, having held the offices of Lieutenant Governor of Crown Point and Ticonderoga, was called Governor.

In addition to a stone residence, he erected another stone edifice, one hundred and thirty feet long, for a military garrison and depot, so that as late as the War of 1812, it was considered a fortified spot of sufficient importance to be the theatre of hostile invasion.

At the council of war held at Castleton, prior to the taking of Ticonderoga by Ethan Allen early in the Revolution, it was determined to send thirty men under Captain Herrick to surprize Skenesborough, capture the son of Major Skene—who was himself in Europe—his negroes and tenantry, and seize upon such boats and military stores as might be found. The surprize was complete: Major Skene, Junior, twelve negroes, fifty tenants, the Governor's stone buildings and their contents were soon in the possession of the assailants without bloodshed.

The most surprizing find, however, was the body of the wife of the elder Skene—the good lady having been dead for years—which was preserved in his cellar, to secure the fond husband and widower in an annuity devised to her, *"while she remained above ground."* The Americans buried the corpse in the rear of the house, thus depriving the thrifty major of a tidy sum, and, embarking on board one of his schooners, sailed down the lake to join Allen.

A garrison was stationed there in 1776, and there the vessels with which General Arnold made his celebrated fight on the lake, were constructed and partially armed. Later in the war it was occupied by the British under General Burgoyne, on whose campaign went the proprietor. At the Battle of Bennington, where he was recognized by many of his neighbors, earnest efforts were made to capture him alive.

Four horses were shot under him, but he made good his escape, to surrender with Burgoyne at Saratoga. Not daring to return home under his parole, he went to England and ordered his buildings burned. His estate was confiscated and sold, and soon after the war the name of Skenesborough was abandoned by the inhabitants and that of Whitehall substituted.

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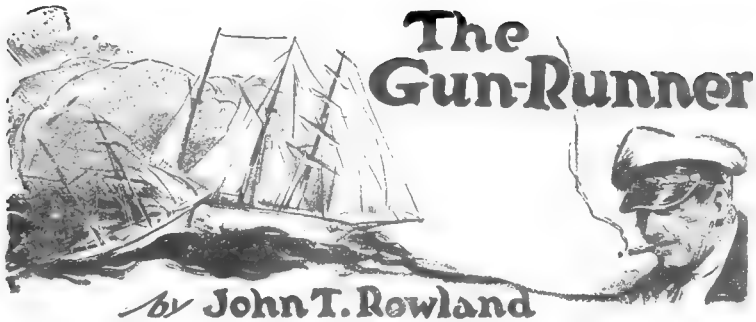

The Gun-Runner

by John T. Rowland

Author of "When Fate Grinned."

THOMAS GATES strode into the cabin of the *Hornet*, flung his pith helmet through the open door of his stateroom and addressed himself to securing the attendance of the steward. As the last echo of his mighty voice rumbled away a furtive China-boy thrust his head past the corner of the messroom door.

"You callee me, cap'n?"

"Call you?" Gates drew himself up to his full six feet three of superbly molded height.

"*Call* you?" he repeated, while his tan cheeks flushed and a knotted vein stood out like a whipcord across his forehead. For a moment he seemed on the very point of dealing death and annihilation. Then he relented—as always—and spoke with a severe dignity instead.

"Sattee, how many times I tell you always come stand before me when I speak to you? There, that's better. Now take the order of Mr. Shehan; and for me—the usual thing."

"I catchum both alleady, cappee. You wantum now, huh?"

Shehan nodded at him from his corner; and the Celestial scurried out with the pleasure of service in his heart and a great relief that the ordeal of the captain's return aboard ship was past. It was always like that when Gates came back. He believed in letting all hands know it.

Mat Shehan laid down the detective story in which he had been engrossed.

"Well, how'd you make out ashore?" he asked with an attempt at gruffness.

Sattee entered with the drinks, offered the captain his first and was waved peremptorily away.

"I wish you wouldn't be so confoundedly polite," complained Shehan, seizing his glass.

Gates looked at him with the steady cold glare which had taken the cheek out of many a sailor.

"Made out fairly," he replied. "Park the tray on the table, Sattee. Me still too much hot, savvee?"

"Fairly—got a charter for north side of Cuba; twenty-five thousand, free loading and discharge."

Shehan fairly shot up from his chair. "Twenty-five *thousand*—impossible!"

The Old Man tossed him a closely-written document, and Shehan spread it open upon his chubby knees and fairly devoured its wording. It was the usual form for the charter of a sailing vessel, and told how Messrs. Peabody & Hind of New Orleans had engaged the "good ship called the *Hornet*—American three-masted schooner of 526 net registered tons—" to carry a cargo of machinery and merchandise to a named port in the island of Cuba.

The document had been signed by Ebenezer Peabody for the charterers and lacked only Mr. Shehan's signature on behalf of the vessel to make it binding. His hand trembled a little as he produced a gold-banded fountain pen and wrote "Matthew Shehan, Manager," across the bottom.

Gates extended a hand, but his partner held on to the paper.

"Where's the catch?" he inquired huskily.

The other scowled.

"Take it up, yourself. There's no catch that I know of."

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"But it isn't in nature!" Shehan protested. "Why, twenty-five *hundred* would be a good price for carrying this little wad of junk."

The captain swung to his feet and strode to the messroom door.

"You, Sattee," he roared, "get along out o' this—go forward!"

He returned in a few moments and began toying with his drink. Like most men of his stamp Tom Gates was never embarressed except when called on to recount an achievement.

"Your man couldn't do anything for me," he growled at length; "but he suggested going to see these Peabody people—sugar planters."

"Did you tell old Peabody you were my partner?" Shehan interrupted.

"He appeared to know it—spoke of you. We had a little talk, and fixed it up."

"Say, skipper, what is this machinery?"

"Machine guns and rifles."

The business man of the strangely-mated pair who owned the *Hornet* on equal shares got slowly to his feet, and started pacing back and forth across the cabin. Gates watched him make three turns before he spoke again.

"It's all right, Shehan," he said; "I know all the inside dope. Peabody has big holdings in Cuba and it seems that his people have been playing politics there, too. He's a bit leary over what may happen after the elections next month—and he believes in safety first. Nothing to fear, of course, except from some disgruntled local *politicos;* but they can start a shindy that might do a lot of damage to a growing crop. Peabody prefers preparedness to law suits, that's all."

Shehan shook his head. "It wasn't the *ethics* of the thing I was worried about—but I suppose he gave you instructions how to get it ashore. It's mighty tempting—prepaid, at that——"

"Sure thing. We'd be fools not to take it. I've sent for the mate; we'll get a tug and haul round to the loading berth this afternoon."

THREE days later the schooner *Hornet* passed seaward into the Gulf. She picked up a nice little northeast breeze and stood down for the Strait of Florida. The passage was uneventful.

Gates, as usual, became moody as soon as he got to sea. Shehan, who was down on the ship's articles as supercargo, turned palely green and dragged himself as far as a deck chair lashed to the weather rail of the quarterdeck. Whatever inclination the *Hornet's* master may have felt to discuss details of the voyage with him soon vanished, and by the time Shehan had overcome his affliction, Gates had retreated within his shell. Old habits of discipline reasserted themselves and its customary reserve barred the way to friendly intercourse.

So it happened that Captain Tom kept a number of things to himself. Chief among these was the rather complicated plan for the landing of the cargo. Although the cases had been put on board quite openly, marked neatly with letters and numbers corresponding to items in the manifest, there was no hope that they could be got ashore in the same facile way. As Gates understood it, he was being paid to assume his employer's risk and to play the game through. He flatterd himself that old Peabody had not mistaken his man.

This meant not only breaking the law which forbade the importation of firearms but, as one thing led to another, evading the customs regulations too. So from being a peaceful merchantman the good ship *Hornet* had become suddenly a gun-runner and a smuggler—an outlaw of the seas.

To this aspect of the case he had given scarcely a thought.

"To smuggle liquor is bad and to run in chinks is worse," he had told Peabody, "but if I can make a piece of money running guns to help your people protect themsleves against spig cutthroats I'm more than willing to do it."

Perverted ethics? Perhaps—but very human, at least.

WHEN a sailing-vessel tries to go from the Gulf to the east end of Cuba in Summertime the poor lady has 'most everything against her. Indeed her only way of getting there at all is to make a big circle north around the Bahamas and then come in toward the Cuban coast from the eastward. Following this route consumed over three weeks in the *Hornet's* case. On the evening of the twenty-third day from her departure she slipped past Great Inagua Island, just as the sun was setting behind the misty hills of Cuba. To

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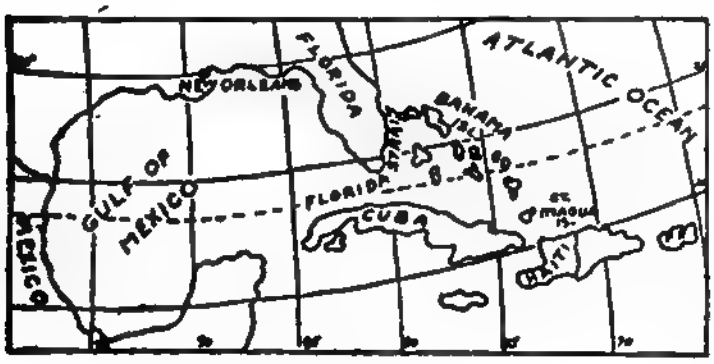
be sure her people did not see those hills, for they were still some fifty miles away, but the crew of another craft did, and they strained their eyes seaward and repeated the question which was now becoming trite, "Well, I wonder will she show up *tonight?*" Which archaic construction, by the way, is still in good usage on the sea.



Soon the swift falling darkness enveloped both vessels and the hills, too. The master of the stranger hove her to where she was—with Cape Maysi bearing south, and waited. A fresh breeze blew from a little north of east, and the *Hornet* came down quietly dead before it.

She was some four hours in reaching the trysting place, but when she did arrive it was with such precision that she nearly ran the smaller vessel down. Captain Gates prided himself on his navigation.

"Schooner, there! What's wrong with your lights?" he bellowed as the *Hornet's* bow swerved just in time to avoid a collision.

"Same thing's matter with yours, I reckon," came the reply. Then after a moment's pause the voice went on, "You under charter to old man Peabody?"

"Right! Lie where you are and I'll round-to. Then come alongside under my lee."

"I'll come alongside how and when I —— please, and I don't need any directions from you!" was the amazing retort.

By this time the two vessels had drawn a considerable distance apart.

"I've a mind to keep going and give that surly beggar a scare," Captain Tom growled to Shehan, who had come up to witness the maneuvres.

The latter gave a start, but quickly recovered his poise.

"What's the good?" he drawled. "Just make him peevish and delay the game that much more."

"He's peevish now, I'll say," Gates retorted. "But I don't know that I blame him: he's got the worst end of it, by far."

Coolly estimating the distance between the two craft, he ordered the *Hornet's* helm put down. She rounded up into the wind and came to rest with canvas gently flapping about a hundred yards to leeward of the smaller schooner.

"Now we'll see what that bird does. Light up your foresheet, Mr. Swensen, and let her lie. Hello—what's become of my partner?"

"Mr. Shehan, sir?" replied the mate; "he just went down into the cabin."

Gates laughed and shook his head.

"Least curiosity of any man I ever went to sea with! Well, get along, Mr. Swensen; let the bosun take a couple of hands to rig a whip from the main gaff while you and the rest of the gang get hatch-covers off. I'll take the wheel myself. That'll do, Johnson; get forward and give the mate a hand. Look alive now, boys, we haven't more than a few hours of darkness."

While preparations for the transshipment of cargo went on apace Captain Gates stood by himself near the wheel, watching the maneuvers of the stranger. She was a two-masted vessel of fisherman build, very obviously fast and handy. With a whine of blocks her larger sails ran down, for all the world like a big sea bird folding its wings. Then, under only a single jib, she swung off and ran straight for the *Hornet.*

"Pretty neat, that!" muttered Captain Tom. "They can handle those vessels like a motor car."

But when less than a ship's length separated the two he became suddenly uneasy. Still the stranger held on, unswerving.

There was a shout of warning from the mate, forward; then the *Hornet's* skipper let out a roar.

"Keep away, blast you—you farmer!" he bellowed. "Down helm!—or you'll—"

Crash! The sound of splintering wood cut short his speech. The stranger's stout oak stem pierced the *Hornet's* high bulwarks amidships and the shock of collision threw her people off their feet. Then, before any one could realize what was happening, a dozen men sprang to her deck from the stranger's bows and a bedlam of blows, oaths and shouted commands rose from the stricken vessel's waist.

Tom Gates crouched like a tomcat facing a terrier. All his life had been a school for action which had accustomed him to making quick decisions. A single bound

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carried him to the after companion hatch leading down to the cabin, where he kept his arms.

The doors were shut and the slide had been pulled over. One yank on the knob showed him they were bolted within.

He pounded on the slide. "Open up, Mat!" he shouted.

No answer.

"Open up, you —— coward, or I'll——"

"Oh, no you won't, bucko, you're captured."

It was a surly, leering voice, back of a large automatic. Tom recognized it as the same that had answered him from the other vessel a few minutes before.

"What's your game?" he demanded, wheeling sharply.

The other gave a guffaw.

"What's yours?" he retorted. "I've got a job for this 'machinery' you're carryin', my high-and-mighty friend. Steve Blatch thanks you kindly for the help you've give him, and now he'll just take charge!"

"I'll see you in —— first!" exulted Captain Tom, in his relief that he had not fallen into the hands of Government agents.

The stranger's pistol wabbled a trifle as he laughed, enough to give the captain the little encouragement he asked. Like a flash he lunged forward, snapping the whole of his great strength into a lightning punch.

His knuckles smashed against bone, a flash of nitro powder signed his hair and a bullet creased the muscle over his right shoulder, but the pirate skipper jerked over backwards and fetched up in a heap against the rail.

Gates sprang after the weapon. But while he was still in air two new shapes collided with him and the three went down with a grinding crash upon the deck.

Then there were shouts, the sound of running feet.

"Hold his arms, boys!" exhorted a big negro wading into the scrimmage with an iron belaying-pin held aloft.

"You dirty scum!" roared Captain Tom as he twisted about to get his feet into action.

But the belaying-pin came down with a thud, and for Tom Gates the lights went out.

WHEN he came to his senses Gates' first sensation was one of dazing pain. Where he lay the darkness was complete. He could see nothing—not even the hand before his face. He groaned and relaxed for a few moments with eyes closed. Then a question came suddenly to his mind. Ten o'clock, the luminous wrist-watch showed by way of answer. Gates moved his wrist toward his ear and discovered that the timepiece was still going.

"Queer," he muttered; "I'd have said it was after ten o'clock when we were captured. Holy Smoke, it's tomorrow morning!"

Without moving his aching head he began exploring about with groping hands. He seemed to be lying on a heavy tarpaulin. A little distance on his right was a coil of rope. His fingers gaged the rope's diameter with the nicety of a pair of calipers. Still under the impression that he had been stowed away in his own lazaret, that coil puzzled him greatly. He could not remember its purchase.

"Hello!" he muttered sharply, for his hand in its roaming exploration came upon something cold and hard—a bundle of these things in fact, tied together with coarse cord.

"Ax heads. Now surely I never bought a flock of those!"

If Tom Gates had been himself the true explanation would have dawned on him, no doubt, much sooner than it did. However, when his hand encountered the vessel's deck beams not three feet above his head he knew that he was aboard a stranger, for in the *Hornet's* 'tween-decks one might almost stand erect.

This discovery swept the realization of physical pain from his mind as abruptly as the throwing of a switch. In command of a mine-sweeper in the North Sea, Captain Gates had once taken his vessel two hundred miles to port with the greater part of her stern blown off and one propeller crippled; and not until her safe arrival there was he even conscious of the severe contussions of back and thigh which he had suffered when hurled across the bridge by the explosion. Now the same quality of intense absorption came to his aid again.

Still, he was too wise to waste his impoverished strength. Plan first and act afterward—that was the rule. Obviously he was locked up in the lazaret—the storeroom—of the fisherman. On such a vessel this compartment was right aft under the quarter-deck, with which alone it communicated by means of a hatch in the deck. This no doubt explained the absence of

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bonds, for he could not possibly open that (even supposing it was not barred on the outside) without attracting the notice of the helmsman and probably that of the officer on watch as well.

Very pretty! But hold on— He made rapid inspection of his pockets and discovered that he had not so much as a match or a penknife left. Well, that was to be expected. Some other line of attack——

For a full quarter of an hour Tom Gates sat propped against the casing of the rudder post, his mind deep in thought. Then he was ready to act.

A gentle heaving and the swish of water along the schooner's side told him that she was still at sea. This being so, the sound of wind and wave might cloak some gentle noise of his own making. It was kind of his captors to have supplied those ax heads!

First he explored carefully his prison cell, crawling about on hands and knees with arms groping ahead like the antennae of some great blind insect. There were more coils of rope, spare canvass, great pulleys—blocks, a sailor calls them—paint pots and balls of tarry marline, all things that one might expect to find in such a place.

A little disappointed, Gates came back to his starting point. Suddenly his heart gave a wild thump: lashed beside the rudder post was an oblong shape with sharp corners—a chest. Groping for the latch he found it padlocked.

He stopped again to think; and as he did so there came a sharp order on the deck above. He heard the helmsman's muttered response and felt the vessel right herself as she ran up easily into the wind. For a moment before filling away on the other tack she lay right in the eye of the wind with sails thrashing. Gates knew well how this racket drowned every other sound in the ears of a man on deck. He reached out and dragged the ax-heads to him, bent swiftly and seized between his teeth the cord that bound them together, then yanked at it with all the strength of his two arms.

The coarse string parted; the ax-heads fell with a clatter. Picking one up with his right hand, he groped for the padlock with his left, found it and dealt it a smashing blow, all in the space of a few seconds.

The lock was shattered. With strong fingers he wrenched it apart. Raising the chest's lid he found it to be what he had scarcely dared hope — the bosun's tool chest.

"Well, they *are* a pack of jays!" Gates muttered.

Then a wave of giddiness obliged him to lie down quickly lest he faint.

He did not realize, of course, that his captors had carried him down to that hole expecting to bear him forth a corpse, nor could he know that only an almost total cessation of heart action while he lay unconscious had permitted the blood clot to form which had saved his life. To Captain Tom the whole thing seemed a very bungling way to treat a dangerous prisoner. Cheerfully selecting by touch the tools he needed he went about the task of making himself a free man.

On such a craft the lazaret is divided from the cabin only by a wooden bulkhead. It was a short job to bore an augur hole through it. When he had done this he got his next surprize: save for the faint glow of a bracket lamp on the wall the schooner's cabin was dark. He had lain unconscious for nearly twenty-four hours!

From a wide bunk on the starboard side of the cabin came the deep, regular breathing of a sleeper.

Gates worked silently but swiftly. He had oiled the blade of his key-hole saw so that it bit the soft wood of the partition almost without a sound. The planks ran perpendicularly. It was only necessary to cut them top and bottom in order to lift a whole section out. What he feared most was that some one might come below before he had finished, for if that should happen he would be trapped and helpless.

His intention was to leave the sawed section hanging by a shred and then, inserting a finger through the top augur hole, draw it towards him and lower it quietly to the deck of the lazaret. But his hand trembled with physical weakness and in his haste he sent the keen blade a stroke too far. It cut through the last quarter inch; the sawed-out square toppled forward and fell into the cabin.

With a snort the sleeper woke at the clatter.

Gates shot through the aperture and rushed at him, saw still in one hand and ax-head upraised in the other.

The man sat up, blinked and then opened his eyes to size of saucers: it was Swensen, the mate of the *Hornet*.

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"Never mind about *me*," Captain Tom whispered impatiently. "Tell me as quick as you can just what happened."

"Well, sir, it's like this," Ole Swensen replied: "as soon as they'd taken the *Hornet* these pirates shifted half our crew to this vessel, includin' yourself—which they carried over nearer dead than alive—and left the rest of the gang on the ship. The chief pirate is aboard the *Hornet*, his mate is in charge here. They're all packin' guns and we've got not even our knives left—so what could we do?"

"I'm not blaming you," Gates cut in. "Leave that out. What's their game; do you know?"

"No idea, sir. We've been standing down all day through the Windward Passage. Haiti's ahead—Gulf o' Gonaives. They haven't let me on deck since nightfall."

"And the *Hornet*—what have they done with her?"

"She's following astern; we've been scoutin' ahead of her, runnin' over to have a look at every smoke that showed up."

Gates was silent for a few moments, his brow puckered in thought. Pirates—firearms—Haiti, and the Occupation to terminate within a month—perhaps indeed they might not even wait for all the Marines to get out!

"Swensen," he whispered tensely; "I've got somehow to get back aboard the *Hornet*. This has gone way beyond anything I dreamed!"

The ex-mate shook his head.

"There's a fore scuttle you might swarm out of, sir, and get on deck unseen; but for the rest you'll have to swim——"

Captain Tom nodded gravely. "Just so," he said; "just so."

THE warm, starlit waters of Gonaives Bay served Gates as a tonic. To be sure there was some danger from sharks—great thirty-foot maneaters whose fins might be seen any fine day drifting lazily along over the slopes of the tropic sea, and it did not greatly please the swimmer that his body left such a trail of phosphorescent fire behind. But this was an unavoidable peril like drifting mines in war time: the less thought of it the better.

Evidently with darkness the laden vessel had been permitted to creep up on her escort; Gates could make out her lightless bulk against a patch of bright sky in the northwest.

He swam easily and, naked as he was, without conscious effort. Only a heavy knife secured by a lanyard around his neck burdened him, and that but little.

"For sharks—human or otherwise," he had said.

Presently Gates could make out the separate masts of the *Hornet*. All his effort then centered upon placing himself exactly in her path. As he moved gently ahead waiting for her to come down wind to him his mind rushed ahead and began to form plans.

Swensen had seen nothing of Matthew Shehan. The latter must then still be a prisoner aboard the *Hornet*. If Gates could somehow get to him and set him free—that was unquestionably the best line to work on. Shehan, clever fellow that he was, might even have secreted some arms before the cabin was finally broken into; not likely that he would have put up a fight: his nature ran rather to scheming. Lucky, too, as things were working out: Mat would be little use to him dead!

On came the big schooner at a lazy four-knot gait, her sails bellying darkly to the soft trade wind.

Now her bluff bows loomed nearly overhead; her bowsprit chains cut a swathe of fire through the black water. Gates seized them and drew himself up. He climbed up the headgear of stays and struts and crouched there for a moment while he unclasped his knife.

"Deuce of a way for the master to come aboard his ship!" he muttered.

The whimsical thought gave birth to a sudden idea. Why not work upon sailors' superstitions? He raised his eyes above the level of the forecastle-head and looked about. There stood the lookout—one of his own men. No doubt the captors kept their armed guard aft.

The situation seemed made to order. Captain Tom filled his great lungs and in a cavernous voice called out—

"O Johnson, Johnson, keep you a bright lookout over my ship!"

The man wheeled sharply, arms thrown aloft. As quickly Gates ducked his head behind the rail. His voice had seemed to come from the air or from the ocean under the ship.

Johnson muttered thickly and moved uneasily about. Gates passed himself down

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under the bowsprit and up the other side. Looking cautiously again he beheld the man peering over the rail on the side from which the voice had come.

"Johnson!" he called. "—— you, I'll grind your bones——"

It was the tone, no doubt, that took effect. Perhaps the poor fellow never even heard the words. With a scream of terror he leaped to the main deck and raced aft, yelling at the top of his lungs.

This was Captain Tom's chance and he seized it. Climbing over the rail, he sprang to the compressor lever of the port anchor chain and slashed away its lashings with a blow. The ponderous anchor plunged into the depths and the chain ran out with a roar. From a silent ship the *Hornet* was transformed into one on which pandemonium raged. It was so sudden that for an instant Gates himself was taken aback.

He knew every inch of her like a book. On this knowledge he had half-formed a plan of campaign. Raising the small hatch on the forecastle-head he dropped through into the inky darkness of the windlass space. There the clatter was so deafening that he could hear nothing else; but this ceased abruptly when the chain presently fetched up with a terrific jerk at its "bitter end."

Then came shouts and curses.

"You dummy, I'll teach you to see ghosts and set the compressor adrift!" screamed a voice which he recognized with difficulty as that of the renegade chief.

Johnson apparently evaded punishment by flight, for the man swore again and roared at another to know how much scope was out.

"Sure the whole lot of it, sor—a hundred and twinty fathom. And the end is shackled to a ring-bolt in the keelson."

It was the *Hornet's* boatswain and Gates detected a note of relish in his voice.

"Glad, are you?" snarled the other. "I'll give you just five minutes to get that shackle adrift and let 'er go."

"Hold on, captain," a new voice cut in; "hadn't you better make sure this isn't Gates' doing, really? That man is capable of anything!"

Captain Tom waited no longer. Through another hatchway he slid down into the chain locker. And there he sank weakly upon a balk of timber and dropped his head upon his hands, for he had received a blow below the belt. Mat Shehan, his partner, was a traitor confessed.

IT WAS not so much the apparition of his skipper, sitting naked in the *Hornet's* hold, as the wild look in his fever-ridden eyes that caused Tim O'Connor, boatswain, to drop his light.

" 'Strewth, sor, an' y're a rare one!" cried that faithful soul when he had struck a fresh match. " 'Tis mesilf knew ye were at the bottom av it even whin I heered the squarehead holler! ' 'Tis the Ould Man come back aboard,' I says to mesilf."

"Silence!" Gates commanded.

The old Irishman laughed.

"They can hear nothing, sor. The lot o'thim have gone aft to have a look at the chart and see how soon that kellick ye let go will fetch the bottom."

Gates shivered convulsively. The bosun yanked off his cotton shirt and spread it over his quaking shoulders.

"If ye plaze, sor—'tis clane."

"Thank you," said Captain Tom.

There was a silence while the two swayed to the gentle motion of the ship and the candle in Tim O'Connor's hand threw eery shadows down the length of the cavernous, half-filled hull.

"Hadn't you better be getting after that shackle?" asked Gates at last.

"As you say, sor—you're the master."

Captain Tom took a deep breath.

"We've got to scuttle her, Bosun. It's the only thing left."

O'Connor's face set grimly and he nodded.

He produced a Stillson wrench from his hip pocket and attacked a union in the deck-pump line leading to the donkey-engine house overhead. It yielded to his efforts and soon a gushing well of sea water flowed into the *Hornet's* bottom.

"Better sink in honor than swim in perdition," muttered O'Connor. "Now that I think of it, sor, there's a sea-cock clear of the cargo aft. I'll open that too and she'll end her sufferin' the faster."

Gates followed him and watched the lethal act as one in a trance.

"Now that's done, I'll be runnin' for'ard to knock out yon shacklepin and save me own tough hide—but what about you, sor?" the old fellow demanded suddenly.

"Don't think about me," Gates said thickly, sitting down on a case of his accursed cargo.

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Then suddenly he roused.

"I'll have a word yet with Matthew Shehan."

"'Tis a proper Judas, that one!" cried O'Connor.

While the boatswain was busy at his last distasteful task Captain Tom felt his way over top of the cargo until he came to a spot directly under his own stateroom. Then standing erect he ran his fingers along the smooth planks overhead which formed the cabin floor until they encountered a knob. He turned this very softly and standing on tiptoe raised a trap door the barest crack, and listened.

No light came through, but voices, muffled as by a slim partition, reached his ears. He thrust open the trap, drew himself up, and stood once more in his own cabin.

Only a closed door separated him from the messroom. Two men were talking earnestly on the other side.

As Captain Tom listened a sudden tremor shook the ship.

"There goes the chain—thank God for that!" cried Shehan's voice.

"He's a friend of yours?" sneered the other. "I reckoned the Old Hookey was more in your line."

"Can it, Blatch," Shehan snapped; "I've done my share and everything has come off fine. Now you're trying to crawl on account of a little noise. I thought you had more guts!"

There came a sound as of some one smiting a table.

"You've done a fine job, Shorty, right enough! How you ever hitched up with this fool Gates is by me—an' he never suspectin' you to the finish! But that's all the more reason to play it safe. I'm for open sea. The *Vanguard* can overtake us and report to-morrow——"

"Hi, cap," came a hail from the deck, "somethin' standing out from the shore throwin' a searchlight!"

"Our friends, most likely," interposed Shehan.

"Friends ——" cried the other springing up. "Gybe her over!" he bawled out to the deck. "Stand out to sea, and watch for the *Vanguard* comin' back."

He strode to the door of the stateroom behind which crouched Gates.

"Reckon I'll need my other gun," he growled.

Mustering the whole of his depleted strength, Captain Tom gathered himself for the spring which would send one of his enemies into the Great Beyond. The knife blade, issuing between the second and third fingers of his clenched right fist which was drawn back even with his breast, showed that he had no intention to let opportunity pass.

The door opened a crack. He crouched lower and held his breath.

But in that instant, while the life of one at least hung in the balance and possibly that of all three, there happened one of those things which seem sometimes to be timed with an exact nicety by some Power beyond our ken. Starting gently, almost imperceptibly, but with speed swiftly increasing, the schooner *Hornet* rolled to starboard. Down, down, down she went, until the cataract of water pouring over her high bulwarks was distinctly heard by those within her cabin, and with it came a sound even more startling—the muffled rumble of waters within her hull.

This was followed by the crash of crockery in the pantry and the frightened shouting of men upon her deck.

From the messroom there came not a sound. Gates put his shoulder to the door and hove it open.

Mat Shehan sat in a chair fastened to the floor behind the table, his face the color of chalk. Half-way up the steeply-inclined floor stood the miscreant Blatch. Instinctively he had let go the stateroom door when the vessel began to list and had started to scramble up; then, the pitch becoming too steep for further progress, he stood poised like a jack-daw on the roof of a house.

With a little shiver that seemed to presage her fate the schooner came to rest half on her side, her decks at an angle of nearly forty-five degrees to the horizontal.

"You!"

Shehan's lips framed the single word, but his voice was no more than a whisper.

Blatch's eyes bulged, but he said nothing. A grim half-smile twisted the corners of Tom Gates' mouth as he looked from one to the other. Shehan, he saw, could kill him without moving, provided he was armed, but Blatch was almost within arm's reach. It was the latter who seemed first to recover his wits. But as the renegade's hand shot within his coat Gates sprang. He caught the other about the middle and

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hurled him down on the slanting deck with a force that rattled his bones. Then over and over they rolled to the low side of the cabin.

Gates had dropped his knife and was choking his enemy with one hand while with the other he strove for possession of the pistol. Though a smaller man, Blatch was a graduate of the school of rough and tumble and between kicking and gouging he several times nearly broke free.

But Gates clung to his pistol wrist for life itself, and never relaxed a bull-dog hold on his throat. Expecting every moment a shot in the back, he strove to keep Blatch's body between himself and Shehan. His fingers grew numb, then his whole fore-arm, and his head swam with the agony of holding fast. But suddenly, when he thought he could endure it no longer, Blatch went limp in his grip.

Seizing the pistol, Gates staggered to his feet and glared across the wardroom at his partner.

"I've scuttled her, Mat. Will you take yours sitting or standing?"

That question was never to be answered. Instead there came a scared voice down the cabin sky-light:

"They've set fire to the *Vanguard*, cap—there's a patrol craft o' some kind standin' this way——"

The words trailed off in space as the speaker ran to fight for a place in the life-boat.

In the *Hornet's* messroom they heard the whine of blocks and the splash with which the boat took water. Then came curses and a scream or two, followed by the rattle of oars hurriedly run out and the rapid beat of blades as they dug at the ocean.

This too dwindled away. But as it grew faint another sound increased. Right alongside it came. O'Connor clattered down the companionway and thrust his head into the cabin.

"There's a sub-chaser patrol boat—Saints above!" he gasped as his eyes took in the grim tableau.

Something bumped the *Hornet's* stern.

"Over you go!" a sharp voice commanded.

Footsteps sounded on the deck above, then down the steps, and a Naval officer with three men at his back loomed in the open door.

Gates tossed his revolver to the floor.

"You've made quite a haul, lieutenant," he said, his voice all at once toneless and heavy with fatigue. "Arrest those two—and be quick about it—she's sinking. I'll stay, if you don't mind, and go down with my vessel; I'm in Dutch on this show, myself."

O'Connor all this time had seemed bursting with speech.

"Sure, sor," he cried out now, "you'll not be havin' the chanst. 'Tis mesilf wint below and shut off the wather as soon as iver she took a list."

Gates recoiled as at a blow.

"You did me a bad turn there!"

He turned to the young Naval officer who had continued a mute witness to this remarkable scene.

"I have a cargo of contraband," he explained wearily. "Thought it was for a sugar planter in Cuba, but it turned out to be part of a plot to run arms into Haiti and start a revolution—or a massacre."

He looked bitterly at Shehan and his eyes seemed to be measuring the distance between them.

Then O'Connor sprang his great surprize.

"Contraband, is it?" he roared; "and since whin, sor, has a lot of ould gas-pipe and cast-off junk been called *that?* Come below, gints, and see for yersilves—half the cases bust open whin she rolled."

A thousand ideas swirled through Captain Gates' tortured brain. One, however, remained permanently fixed: if it was really true that his vessel carried no arms but only a few hundred cases of harmless junk then surely there was nothing incriminating about her business. Some one had been fooled, to be sure; but what mattered that now to him? He was an honest man again!

But swiftly as this elation came it again departed. There was Shehan—his partner. Gates remembered how he had first met him in a waterfront cafe in New Orleans. It had been a case of mutual advantage: Shehan, with money to invest, looking for a ship and master; Gates hunting for some one with business acumen and a knowledge of the schooner-game to go in with him on the purchase of the fine three-master *Hornet* to which he had lost his seaman's heart. If *he* was implicated in this dirty business——

This train of thought was rudely broken by a wild curse that sprang from the lips of

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Blatch, who up to this time had lain motionless where Gates dropped him. The man's scarred face was purple and his baleful eyes poured forth hate like those of a trapped beast.

"Double-crossed us, did ye—ye scum?" he screamed at Shehan across the tilting wardroom. "There's them'll get ye fer that even if ye squirm through the fist of the law!"

Then like a flash his look changed and a cruel smile curled the corners of his mouth.

"Look-a here, mister," he addressed the officer; "this fourflusher has been playin' the ends against the middle. He'll be posin' next as innercent owner of the *Hornet* along with dummy Gates. But take it from me, mister, Shehan was the brains of our whole crowd. Him it was found the vessel, bought the goods, passed 'em through old man Peabody so's to cover our tracks—and it was him worked out the scheme of havin' us capture the *Hornet* the way we did. That was so Gates wouldn't get wise to nothin' until——"

"It was to catch you red-handed in an act of piracy, my gun-running friend," said Matthew Shehan in a voice like ice. Then crisply and to the utter amazement of all except the Naval contingent he continued: "Lieutenant Parsons, hurry after the rest of these cutthroats—and be careful not to harm any of the *Hornet's* crew who may have gone with them. Captain Gates upset our plans somewhat by nearly sinking his ship."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the young officer smartly.

A twinkle came into his blue eyes as he turned for an instant to Tom Gates who stood dazed in the center of the wardroom.

"Captain," he said, "permit me to present you to your late partner, Major Charles Burnham, formerly of the Army Intelligence Office but now acting as a volunteer secret operative for the Department of Justice."

Author of "Lonesome," "The Shellers," etc.

THE settlement of Calvin Grass consisted of the opportunities at the crossroads of the Westering Highway and the Wide Crossing Trail, which leads down to the Rio Grande. Wide-flung in the mesquite, alkali and rough-wash country were ranches and lesser tracts of claimed lands, with some fencing, varying types of dwellings from the beautifully ordered homes of cattle kings to the huts and cabins, even the canvas rag-shacks of poor whites, or even automobos who, having a trickle of water, would camp and live on the game, deer, turkeys, quail, jackrabbits, and even passing flocks of wild fowl.

Calvin Grass looked forward to a great future. Shipping a hundred thousand head of cattle annually in the flush times of sixty-dollar beeves, the local bank could well afford the splendid Grecian architecture of its home, and the number of people in the population who had balances amounting to thousands at the bank and notes in the tens of thousands would have astonished the casual passer-by who did not know the

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wonder of this land of openness and starlight and rich bunch grass.

A man rode into Calvin Grass one Autumnal day. A Texas Ranger is hard to recognize just by looking at him. If all the Rangers were graded according to their appearance, they would make a long series of faces, from shy, diffident, blushing, boyish fellows, each trying to poke around behind the slightly less diffident and backward boy next to him, on through some quite plain and even or'nary-looking faces, right on to the supreme and overwhelmingly appropriate countenance of just the kind of a face that one would expect to see, considering their reputation, on a Texas Ranger—a face strong and hard, grim and deadly, utterly fearless and terribly in earnest.

Accordingly no one knew this newcomer was a Ranger when he arrived in town. He swung down at the Eat-a-Bite Café and dropped his bridle ropes in the dust to walk in. He came out, gave his horse a bucket of water and then went in to eat the dinner he had ordered. That special thoughtfulness for his horse and the excellence of the animal attracted instant attention in a community where seemingly trifling things are known upon occasion to be of great importance.

Having eaten, the man paid his shot, walking out and leaping into the saddle to ride over to the Calvin Grass Bank, where, turning the corner, he slid down to walk inside. He surveyed the premises with a quick, bird-like glance, and the cashier reached under the counter for his sawed-off shotgun. Men who surveyed banking premises in some regions are marked and suspicious persons, but this man noticed the gesture and smiled in a deprecatory way.

"I'm a Ranger," he said in a low, cool voice. "My cap'n had word there was a hold-up planned for you all. 'Lowed I'd better come hyar, so hyar I am, Mr. Cardrig."

"Oh, a Ranger, eh!" Cardrig exclaimed with the sharp and pleasant manner of a man covering up his suspicions, yet desiring to be shown.

"Yes, suh," the man continued; and, opening his yellow sheepskin water-proof waistcoat, he showed Cardrig the familiar shape of a Ranger's badge; and, all doubts allayed, the banker immediately awaited the pleasure of the visitor.

"Anything I can do for you?" Cardrig said. "Of course——"

"Not much!"

The Ranger shook his head.

"There'll be five or six of those scoundrels. Lantana's the leader. 'Bitter Drink' 's his lieutenant. Probably that girl, Cassie Saprano, Lantana's wife, 'll hold their horses. Might come in a car, and if they do she'll be driving. We want to catch her alive if we can. She knows a lot if she'd talk; probably she won't. Those women!"

The Ranger shook his head sadly. Long experience with women apparently made him despair of making them talk; that is, the things he wanted to have talked.

"Cap'n thinks she might talk if we worked it right," he added doubtfully. "I don't know."

"I'll call the city marshal; you know Wathers?"

"Oh, yes—his reputation! Never did get to meet him though. I've been up on the northern border in the oil country myself."

"Yes? You're——"

"Rasbar."

"Rasbar! Sho! Why, Rasbar, I'm sure glad to meet you! We heard about that night in Fullbarrel——"

"Sent me down here!" the man said regretfully. "Take an assignment in the oil country and a Ranger needn't grow stale."

These odd jobs on the border—Cardrig felt almost ashamed of Calvin Grass, it was so quiet, so plumb peaceable, and had so little really lively and spicy to entertain a Ranger. Of course a hold-up would be something. The Ranger gave the impression that something had better be pulled off, for he didn't care to be disappointed.

Marshal Wathers came quickly. Cardrig stepped out to make the local authority for keeping peace acquainted with Rasbar, whose name was known up and down the frontier like a favorite governor's or anybody's.

The two looked each other in the eyes. Their faces set. Their frames flexed into the alertness of grizzly bear and cougar. They then advanced their right hands and tapped knuckles with their thumbs, straddled fingers and otherwise made themselves known according to their lodgments.

Something like cordiality sprang up between them. Wathers had not forgotten the old days in the early '90s when he too was a Ranger, making his mark. They tell

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yet how Wathers went into the Chihuahua town at Ft. Meseridal and saved a half-regiment of soldiers from the ruin within this evil adjunct just off the reservation. The old marshal could appreciate the act of Rasbar in the oil country.

The Ranger was an inch less than six feet tall. He was loose-shouldered, long-armed, seemed to have double joints in his hips, and his legs were abnormally long. His face was hard and smooth, his chin a chisel, his brow a maul and his nose like and ivory replica of some Greek god's.

All Rasbar had been obliged to do up in Fullbarrel was to walk into Tony Reswiski's place and tell him it was time to close up; Tony hadn't intended to close up for anything less than an army, but Rasbar of the Rangers *was* an army. He cleaned both sides of Spilling Street and shooed the whole disreputable population right on through to the railroad station—those who didn't roll away in their automobiles. The passenger train that day had to take five box cars off the siding to help carry the people who were anxious to leave town by request of Rasbar of the Rangers.

"I don't know what they sent me down here for," the Ranger said to Wathers.

"Well, you know how it is. Prob'ly somebody wanted to horn in on the other town. Sure! Your job, you'd earned it all right; but you know how it is; some captains plays favorites, lettin' them have all the int'restin' jobs. But mebby he knows this'll be a good'n?"

"Huh!"

The visitor shrugged his shoulders.

Nothing can be more monotonous and unamusing than setting a trap for a bunch of outlaws to walk into if they are just common or'nary, unimportant outlaws. The Rangers haven't hardly had a real trap job worth mentioning since Sam Bass was killed up. Sam was exciting and uncertain to go after.

But these modern hold-ups—lot of Down Easters trying to get started mostly or second-growth native bad sons or below-the-border outfits. The visitor showed he sure despised his job.

"Well, Lantana's been practising up."

Wathers shook his head.

"If he don't meet with no bad luck he'll likely establish hisse'f and be bad!" he added.

"He's had his bad luck," the Ranger grumbled. "They oughtn't to send for us Rangers unless'n it's a real bad gang. Now these Lantanas ain't nothing but a bunch of kids. Why, Lantana can't even shoot for a ——!"

"But that girl Cassie——"

Wathers shook his head.

"A girl!" the Ranger exclaimed. "There ain't been no woman on the range a-romping since Etta Place of the Wild Bunch. Po'r gal! They say she was killed up a year or so ago down to Buenos Aires."

"When them Lantanas due to land hyar?"

"Monday mornin'."

"I don't b'lieve it!" Wathers declared with emphasis.

"Why not?" Rasbar inquired instead of withering him with contempt.

The marshal had been a Ranger. He was likely to have an idea.

"I'll tell yo' why; Monday's tradin'-day; theh'll be two-three hundred outfits in hyar—automobiles, wagons, riders, men, women and children. They'll come in from all oveh."

"Times have changed sincet you was in the Rangers," Rasbar replied. "They won't be no crowd in hyar Monday."

"Why not?"

"Account of a norther that's due hyar Saturday evenin'," the Ranger replied. "That norther's come down across Montana, Wyoming and Colorado. Hit the Panhandle this mornin'. Sunday, tomorrow, hit'll romp down across this town, an' by Monday a wheel can't turn into any road across this country, barring railroads that ain't washed out."

"Sho! The Weather Bureau!"

"You bet! This Cassie Saprano told them boys about this storm. They 'lowed to hit hyar Monday, when the rain's a-falling, the wind's a-blowing, and nobody can move a wheel."

"My land! The Rangers is getting scientific!"

The marshal shook his head, awed.

"They had to to keep up with the times," the newcomer said. "Well, I see the lay of the land. I'll look over the roads 'fore the storm breaks."

He took another look around the bank, walked all around the building and returned to shake hands with Cardrig, who was on the steps.

"We're right glad you came, Ranger," the banker said. "We're always ready

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here, the best we know how to be. Marshal Wathers is second to none. We'll feel a lot safer, having a Ranger on hand to look after things, though."

The visitor jumped on his horse, merely resting his hand on the horn before springing into the saddle. He leaned forward, and the animal shot ahead out on the west road, to see the lay of the land. Cardrig was so well pleased with the lookout kept by the Rangers over the criminals, so thorough that they knew the criminals' plans long before the time of execution, that he called up the Headquarters Troop at the capital just to express his appreciation.

The secretary, Miss Carruth, thanked him cordially. He added praise especially on account of the Ranger's use of Weather Bureau reports to help figure out the scoundrel activities. A light laugh, unmistakable and a most pleasing perquisite of the secretary, returned over the wire.

"Our boys," she said, "just keep stepping with the procession. Who did you say came down there? I hadn't—here—heard about it."

They chatted for a minute, and then hung up. Cardrig saw the Ranger come in and ride out on each of the other roads, finally disappearing down the south road toward the river, and he did not appear again that day.

That night the black norther boomed down the west slopes of the mountains, rain sweeping the earth in sheets and swarms of drops, half-sleet, and filling the ruts in the dust that had been. The following day the downpour continued. The Sunday-afternoon train pulled in and a little man came down on to the bare platform, dragging a saddle after him. He pulled his hat down over his head so that the brim shielded his neck and face and most of his narrow shoulders. He had a carbine rifle in a saddle holster and two flat automatics in his belt. He dragged his saddle across the street along the lee side of the buildings there to the livery stable and inside threw his saddle down, cursing softly.

"Howdy!" the proprietor hailed him.

"Howdy," the man replied.

"I want to rent a mule—a mud-larker."

"A saddle mule?"

"Yes, sir—big, fast and right. I got an order here from Wolwack. You know him? Big rancher down——"

"Wolwack. Know that old scoundrel? Sure I do. Have my whole place if he orders it, yessuh!"

"Course!" the visitor grinned.

There were four or five mules in the corral barn. One was big, speaking of height, length and ears. Really for his size he was light weight. He eyed the livery stable reflectively, even hopefully, but the owner drew quickly away.

"You know mules," the owner said. "Sawback's waited sixteen months now fo' a chancet to kick me. He ain't neveh let go—yet."

"Theh'll be a funeral or some op'rations when he does," the visitor said, grinning as he threw the saddle blanket skilfully, and then loudly slapped the saddle on the brute's back, caught the underflying cinch, and yanked it taut.

The mule groaned, shaking his head, but had the bridle on and bit in his jaws with no delay. As the mule swung forward, heading for the gate, the man swung up and went riding into the street, slogging through the mud, the rain pouring from his slicker on all sides.

"A —— good man, whoever he is," the livery proprietor remarked. "If Wolwack hadn't ordered it, I'd mistrusted him like ——! Well, s'long, old boy! Glad you're riding in this slop, not me!"

THE stranger had been gone an hour when Marshal Wathers drifted into the stable, a tight, wet man in the storm.

"Howdy, Hutch!" Wathers greeted. "Who's that feller riding your long sawback mule?"

"Come in on the train with a Wolwack order, so I let him have the mule."

"Let's see that order."

The paper, torn from a pocket note-book, wet with rain and written in lead pencil, read:

> Let this man have a mule.
>
> WOLWACK.

"Now ain't that like 'im?" Wathers exclaimed testily. "How yo' goin' to know if that scoundrel's a cowhand, a visitor or somebody Wolwack played poker with when he's drunk? That rancher's too high-handed sometimes!"

"What ails yo' anyhow, Wathers?"

"Why, that man come an' asted me down to Wony's if they was any Rangers posted

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around. I asted him what the —— business of his it was? An' he said nothin', on'y he wanted to know if they'd noticed any cattle with peculyah brands. A Ranger asted that question would sure grow light an' sarcastic. He went off down the riveh road. That mule sure mud-larked natcheral."

"Ain't that mules all oveh? So dag-goned contrary they likes 'dobe mud!"

"Hit's seo! Why couldn't Wolwack say 'f that man's a cowhand er jes' somebody general?"

"I don't know. He's paid fo' three-fo'r mules an' hosses to me on orders thataway afteh he sobered up. Kicks, co'rse; always does an' always pays."

"Yo' ain't heard nothin' special—no mean fellers around, threatenin'?"

"No 'citement, not in three-fo'r weeks."

Hutch shook his head.

"Not sincet them *mescal*-runners an' the Federal watch went by on the county lane."

"Huh!" the marshal grumbled; and, pulling down his hat-brim, dragging his slicker around him and shuddering at sight of his own breath, gray in the chill, he eased himself by degrees into his dripping saddle.

Trying to tuck his slicker under him where it was too short, he swore softly to himself. Hutch watched him ride away and smoked his pipe on it.

"What's old Wathers in his head now?" the livery man mused.

The wind whipped in gusts from the north. Water dripped white from eaves, ringing in rain-barrels with hollow booming. Charges of drops swept the street in splatters for a hundred yards. The liveryman saw to the northward the highway with ruts and hoof-prints level full, shimmering, and the mesquite standing foggily in the gloom for a considerable distance, though near-by trees had been cut for wood. He could even see where Mexicans had dug holes, mining for mesquite roots, the best part of the tree. Calvin Grass sure spent a lot of uninteresting days, just for the joy of living once in a while, Hutch mused.

He heard one of his animals trampling around. He knew it was the black mule, growing restless and uneasy because his side-kick in deviltry, old Sawback, had gone away somewhere. Old Left Leg and Sawback sure were a curious team, or pair. They drove well together in harness, and almost never did any one come for a saddle mule.

"That scoundrel sure knew his business, taking a mule a day like this," Hutch mused. "He must 'a' knowed hit was going to rain elsen he seen Wolwack sincet it 'gun to slop. Da-gone—now my pipe's out, an' I got to fill hit ag'in. Jes' keeps a man busy fillin' his pipe. Tobacco don't last none—hain't cured like it used to be."

He went back to sit by the little tin stove like an old man, waiting for business to pick up again, musing that he would hate to lose Sawback on account of what a —— of a nuisance Left Leg would be forever after without his customary sparring partner to bite and kick at.

MARSHAL WATHERS rode around the corner and out to his office. He found his little tin stove red-hot and the pipe red-hot clear to the 'dobe chimney. Out of the chimney fire was shooting straight up into the rain, about six feet.

"Wah!" Wathers cried. "Dad-goned mesquite! Been blowin' an' kindlin' in that blamed fiah all the mohnin', freezin' an' chillin', an' minute my backs turned, burnin' like ——"

He flung himself inside to kick the stove cover around on the floor till it grew cold enough not to set the wood on fire. He threw a handful of horse salt into the stove, and he watched the roof anxiously for smoke and flames.

"I'd hate to burn out a cold day like this," he grumbled.

Then he stood before the stove, back to it, steaming as he felt instinctively at intervals to be sure he wasn't burning the pants off of him. Personally he was weighing the events of two days in his mind. Long since he had learned to consider trifles, since they might mean so much.

Having been a Ranger, he felt no least pang of jealousy to think that one had come into his town single-handed to protect it from hold-ups. Those had been his happiest days when he was a Ranger—and a good one. For years and years he had stood that enormous strain of living up to the peak of Ranger efficiency.

Marshal Wathers as he dried gloated over the thing that might happen tomorrow. If only the hold-ups didn't hear or lose heart, once more the old .45 would be drawn for

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business in action—trusty old smoker, spitting raw lead, and not these ripping new-fangled steel-jacketed projectiles!

Wathers just knew that the old lead, mushrooming in the flesh, was better than the hard bullets that just bored through, slick and clean as a needle. No shock in these new bullets! Didn't desperadoes ride away with the automatic bullets through them, not knowing they were hit? Or worse yet, staying to shoot automatic wielders all to pieces, paying no attention to their own fatal wounds?

"Dad-gone!" Wathers whispered. "Rasbar's shore upstanding! Like to see that boy draw for business! Six months in the oil country, an' then cleanin' Fullbarrel the way he done—dad-gone!

"Got to give hit to these youngsters. Takes boys to do them things, kids of twenty er thirty! Like to see 'im doin' business! Ain't seen no shootin' fer business—le's see, not sincet we got that black feller two year ago. Huh! Hold up Calvin Grass, eh? Heh-heh!"

CARDRIG, the banker, gravely cleaned his automatic pistols. He scowled angrily as he made sure that every screw was tight, every spring was working, the safety was extra loose and the hammer extra heavy on the plunge. It does make a man mad, just when a country is settling down, becoming thoroughly gentled, to have a projected hold-up burst into the landscape like a tornado or a stampeded herd of steers.

But it was one consolation, the Rangers were on the job. They knew all about it. Rangers somehow were able to forestall about ninety-nine per cent. of the deviltry that might happen, and probably the remaining one per cent. was necessary to keep the force from deteriorating and going to pieces, probably into a political organization and all soft snaps. 'Course, Rangers had to be hard men to confront hard conditions. Good thing that bill hadn't gone through the previous year, disbanding the force!

Cardrig flushed warmly as he remembered that bill. His own district's representative had voted for it, had in fact been one of the prime movers in the idea that the State no longer needed Rangers.

He was ashamed to recall his own feelings in the matter; then he boiled with resentment and hard-faced hate as he thought of Lantana, Bitter Drink and that fool girl, Cassie Saprano. Cassie had been following the rodeos, riding horses and showing how a woman can handle a rope. Then she met Lantana, and it was all off; her fine riding had gone into the service of the hold-ups.

Cardrig shrugged his shoulders. But for the wild men, robbing, shooting, stealing, there'd be no need of Rangers.

Cardrig looked at his deer and bear rifle. Whether to take that to the bank he could not tell. Perhaps if he did the rifle would advertise the preparedness. He guessed he hadn't better. The automatics would do his needs; the Ranger would handle the rest of the matter. Those Rangers could shoot from the hip and roll a tomato-can at thirty yards—part of their training. This boy Rasbar could do that—one of five best shots in the troops at the annual shoot, when the best men of the companies shot off their rivalries. Lordy, what shooting!

So Sunday folded into itself, and the gray night spread in layers, one by one, each darker, over the prospective metropolis. With darkness the storm's noises multiplied in depth and tone. The rain-barrels, in which the housewives caught soft water for the Mexican women to wash with, boomed and splashed like a cataract in the gloom. The wind wailed under the balconies and whistled through the filigree-work.

Cardrig slipped into his waterproofs, put on his hip boots, pulled down the brim of an enormous hat—a fifty dollar nutria that would shed water like an otter's skin—and then walked around into Mountain Street and on down-town, passing the bank on the opposite side. He stopped under the shadow of the grocery opposite and studied his place of business as the electric light glowed before the huge, shiny-metal safe mechanism, illuminating the interior, right and left, the mirrors placed strategetically, reflecting the reflections numerously.

Suddenly Cardrig froze. At his heels had come some one. There was a minute of intense expectation and waiting. Then a cool voice greeted:

"Howdy, Cardrig. Wondered who yo' was!"

"Oh! Howdy, Wathers—that you? Thought I'd better take a look around."

"Yas, suh!"

They strolled along together. Across the street, over the soda-water and soft-drink

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place, a curtain was drawn, but not tight enough to shut in the streak of light around the edges. Both men gazed at it rather longer than at other lights.

"They're getting to play pretty heavy theh," Wathers remarked doubtfully.

"So I hear," Cardrig replied dryly.

"Lot of young bucks."

"Yes—too young, some of them. No control over themselves."

"So I told the mayor," Wathers remarked. "He didn't feel like saying anything, 'course."

"'Course not; but those things keep crowding and crowding. They always do. Don't keep in bounds. No sense."

"No, suh. No sense. Sho— Sh-h!"

Wathers caught the banker by the elbow to drag him into the butcher-shop shadow. They stood crowded against the wall, their backs to it. Down the middle of the street some one was coming on horseback— No! It was a mule. It was Hutch's mule Sawback as sure as the marshal was born!

On the brute's high back was a man, huddled up, round-shouldered, with his wide brim hat turned down all around like an umbrella; and the rain gathering in great drops at the edge caught the street-light and building-light reflections for an instant and then fell. The reflections around the brim seemed to encircle it with sparkling gems.

Walking, lifting each hoof without relation to the three other hoofs, the mule plodded along, unsymmetrical in his gait, his ears lopped dejectedly down, the big drops sweeping and dripping from the tips and from the dangling brush at the end of his tail. Every step sounded not unmusically with a splash and a slop.

The mule obeyed the traffic laws of the town and rounded the "Keep to the Right" concrete block in spite of the lean, the pull at the rein and the rising flow of indignant language of the rider; for the mule refused the short-cut, stretching his head far to the left, yet guided his hoofs clear around the dark, pyramidal marker.

"Now ain't that like a mule?" Wathers whispered as Cardrig chuckled.

"Who's that man?" Cardrig inquired.

"Don't know. Come in this evenin', with an order from Wolwack. Hutch wondered if he'd eveh see that mule ag'in. Yo' know Wolwack——"

"Yes, I know him," Cardrig replied, adding, unusually loquacious: "We get his orders too, money, accommodations—all kinds. Makes him mad to settle them. But he does, 'course; but swearing. Mescal, poker—don't seem to have much judgment."

"But he's got seven thousand head of cattle clear—that Gray Bottom Ranch."

"Yes, and nobody knows how he does it—so blamed careless; and one of the richest men in the country too."

"Yas, suh."

"Well, good night, marshal. That man's a stranger."

"Yes; I'll look afteh him, Mr. Cardrig."

The marshal ran his hand down to his forty-five. He loosened his slicker and walked around to the livery stable. Hutch was sitting by his stove.

"Howdy," Wathers greeted, drawing up a soap-box.

"Howdy. Sawback's in the corral."

"I seen 'im come."

"Asted again about the Rangers."

"Sho!"

"Yeh. Went out. Theh's his saddle."

Wathers glanced uneasily into the gloom beyond the gray-webbed window. Then he pawed over the saddle and its accouterments, cinch, rope, bridle and the rest.

"A good'n!"

He shook his head.

"What's he lug a carbine for?" he asked.

"He didn't say," Hutch replied dryly.

"Suspicious as ——."

Wathers sighed, shaking his head. Hutch made no comment, but he glowered at the marshal. The livery business wasn't what it used to be. The demand for good horses had fallen off in late years. Pack-mules were in demand, however, and Hutch had filled an order for forty in an hour—a clandestine night demand, spot cash.

With automobile roads what they were, mules and burros and horses were still needed, delivering river freight for night traffic. 'Course, Hutch had to be friendly with Marshal Wathers; at the same time, what the —— was the old scoundrel taking such an interest in one of his customers for, anyhow? Hadn't old Wolwack written the order, and hadn't Wathers seen the order?

"Anything up?" Hutch inquired after a time meaningly.

Wathers looked at him searchingly. That question might mean anything or nothing. Hutch met the look unflinchingly, conscious of virgin innocence this time. Wathers

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studied nothing in particular for a while, and then he flung wide the door and stalked forth into the storm.

"Good night!" he said, grunting.

He couldn't talk to anybody, not in this bank business. Hutch might or might not know too much. Wathers couldn't take a chance. Just a whisper that a Ranger was in town might lead to another whisper—blooey!

Some day Wathers would tell Hutch all about it. Then Hutch wouldn't have any hard feelings—he's understand just the pickle the town marshal was in.

Once more Wathers returned to the office. This time flame wasn't spouting out of the chimney, nor was the stove red hot with mesquite fire. But, crouched and huddled up before the stove, spitting with unerring accuracy into a rust-hole through the cover was a man—that same mule-rider.

"Howdy!" the stranger greeted, and under the exact edge of the wide brim Wathers saw the white gleam of a sunken, dark eye.

"Howdy!" Wathers replied shortly as he regretted the rickety but comfortable whirling arm-chair, taking the soap-box.

"Any Rangers around?" the man demanded rather truculently.

Wathers was busy at the moment rolling a cigaret in a paper almost too damp. He worked a long time on the smoke, drying the paper over the stove and working the long-cut—he was odd that way—into the exact size and shape of a bought cigaret. By and by he lighted it on a match—a dry match—proffered by the visitor.

"Nope."

Wathers shook his head deliberately.

"That's funny," the visitor drawled.

"Sure!" Wathers replied with a slight cheerfulness. "Used to be one myse'f though."

"Yeh? When?"

"Back in the nineties."

"Where'bouts?"

"Border mostly."

"Had men, them days," the visitor grumbled. "Some respect fo' 'em. Now——"

"Yeh!"

Wathers nodded complacently. Sometimes Rangers had been different from other times. In his day, though, they had been Rangers according.

"So no Rangers round now?" the man persisted.

"I said *no* oncet," Wathers replied tartly.

The man withered up and steamed for a time. He might have known better than to ask the same question twice, Wathers thought to himself. A man always does hate to have to tell the same lie twice. Well, —— 'im, if he asked that question again, it'd be an insult.

The visitor raised the brim of his hat, and Wathers saw some of his face, the profile of his long, dark, bony nose and a face that was seamed yet youthful. His eyes were sunken, swimming in a pool of loose skin. They were blue eyes. The fellow's chin was buried in his shirt, which was too large and of wool. Just when Wathers had it in mind to close up the office to be rid of him the visitor pulled his hat back down over his face and sidled out into the storm like a bag walking.

Wathers took his own arm-chair, and, clasping his hands across both his shins, sitting on his backbone, he rocked back and forth, smoking. He wondered whether he ought to have made a break.

An hour later he walked over to the hotel. The clerk was sitting by the window. A disconsolate traveling man was sitting at the other end of the row of window-chairs. Between them were newspapers and the air of exhausted topics of conversation.

The traveling man had arrived the night before, and had a most unusual ailment of the automobile—a burned-out distributor, and the nearest distributor was somewhere three hundred miles east. It couldn't be started before Monday morning, for the service stations closed Saturday nights and didn't open till Monday. That meant two or three days in this forsaken hole. Well, the roads were impassable anyhow.

Wathers, accustomed to secrecy and innuendo, motioned the clerk into a distant and darkened former barroom, now an empty and dusty monument to itself, and whispered to him.

"Yeh," the clerk said. "Room 19—didn't register."

"Well, yo' take that book up an' get his fist," Wathers ordered impatiently. The clerk started to speak, but he was wise. He didn't. He went up-stairs with the hotel register. On his return Wathers added—

"What'd he say?"

" 'Who wants it?' " the clerk replied with satisfaction. "Then he signed."

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There was the last line in the book. Wathers looked at it, drew back to get a new focus, squinted closer as if to smell it and grumbled about the dimness of the light. It was a sprawled and indecipherable line, and the name of the town after it might have been N'Orleans, Austin or Phœnix. Wather's temper faded away, and he nodded with satisfaction.

IN THE morning when the hotel guest emerged from the hotel into the rain, which still poured, Wathers watched him. He saw the fellow go down to the corner and turn up to Hutch's livery stable. He saw him go into the barn and saddle Sawback. He saw him ride over to the bank and enter it five minutes after Cardrig opened the front door. Wathers shrank back, his hand on his .45 waiting expectantly.

The stranger swung out of the bank down the four steps, his chaps flapping as wet leather will. He threw himself truculently into the saddle and slogged away in the storm while Wathers stared and stretched his neck, looking for a signal from within. It came the instant the mule rider was half-way down the block. Wathers darted across the street into the bank. Cardrig stretched over to whisper—

"He wanted to know 'f any Rangers are around."

"What'd you tell 'im?"

"No—'course!"

Wathers nodded with satisfaction.

"D'rectly they'll come a-poppin'!" Wathers exulted, smoke of battle in his nostrils.

A man came down the street on horseback. This was the Ranger for whom the marshal and banker now had begun anxiously to look. He sat erect on the horse, which was a beautiful racing animal. He had his broad-brimmed hat aslant, and even his black slicker draped down over his figure half-way to his horse's knees fell in lines of grace and protection.

He reined up to the bank and alighted with easy, noiseless sway and walked up into the building. As he left the street he looked with comprehending eyes up and down and into each of the lanes that led away to the points of the compass toward the gray-misted mesquite out in the open. It was a short run in any direction to the rough country. He was ready.

In the bank were the banker, the town marshal and three other men, the best and most reliable in town. They were waiting there for strangers, for the hold-ups to come a-popping, or however they might come.

The Ranger waved both his hands and as if they were chickens pressed the five by the power of his position and the majesty of his presence back into the president's office for their final instructions. These he gave instantly with the brevity that would have done credit to the least loquacious Ranger that ever lived—

"Up!"

All five found themselves personally covered by two cannon-mouthed automatics, and they put them up. All five pairs of hands went into the air, *pronto* as five chins dropped, displaying cavernous mouths. The banker choked, and Wathers gasped—

"Well, *I'll* be ——!"

"Lantana!" somebody whispered involuntarily, and the hold-up grinned with amused satisfaction. Such is fame!

And on the instant there slithered along the side of the bank and through the front doorway three men, two of them carrying two-bushel wheat-bags. They swarmed into the bank and spread out over the interior, sweeping currency and coin into their bags. A bark from one brought Cardrig in to open the inner safe, which he had locked against this emergency, and he opened it without delay. He saw bearer bonds and other negotiables fall into the bags. At each block or bundle rustled down, Cardrig grew a hue whiter.

Not a precious second was lost. In two minutes the gang had accomplished the job they had come for. As the pretended Ranger kicked the weapons of the astounded guards out of the office he was joined by one of the bandits—Bitter Drink doubtless. The two glanced with satisfaction at the heavily barred windows of the office; there was no other exit except the door, on which swung a long stick, dangling from the key. The bandits pulled the door shut, and Lantana turned the key on the prisoners.

Lantana, Bitter Drink and the two men with the bags on the instant dashed at the front door, and in the glare of the electric lights, which Cardrig had turned on full power for the dark, wet day's emergency, faced a weazened, hatchet-faced, wind-burned little man with two automatics pointing from his hips.

Least loquacious of men, this apparition

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made just the slightest of uplifting gestures with the muzzle of his left-hand gun. The scurrying bandits hesitated so suddenly that they slipped forward on their soles. They froze for an instant, surprized by this jeopardy's proximity. At the one moment of unguardedness as they glanced greedily back to see that no precious bundle of loot had been left, the man had slid from nowhere into the position.

On his shirt, half-hidden in the pocket, was a badge. Here was a Ranger; and at that recognition the four threw up their hands, overwhelmed by the personality, their automatics and revolvers slumping heavily on the floor.

Among the things that fell were the key and its wood block. One of the Ranger's automatic muzzles moved a quarter of an inch, and the smallest of the four bandits stooped hastily and dashed with the key to unlock the door behind which clamored and yelled the locked-in guards and banker.

As the door swung open every man Jack of the five stammered and stood silent at the tableau, the key-turner backing to the wall as the conversational automatics expressively ordered. The bandits stood, white-faced and stretching their hands straight up, and the man stood holding them by sheer deadly threat. A silence fell upon them all.

In that silence they heard a horse galloping away. No, not the rhythmic pound and slog of horse's hoofs galloping, but the unrhythmic and mud-larking rush of a mule in a hurry.

"One's escaping! One's getting away!" Marshal Wathers cried and started, sweeping up his own favorite revolver as he stooped under the level of the Ranger's automatics.

But as he darted he glanced at the Ranger, who gave him a meaning look. Wathers had been a Ranger. He knew that sign. He turned and lined up behind the hold-ups, going through them, seeking concealed weapons and throwing out the knives, pocket automatics and other trinkets.

He slipped on his own two pairs of handcuffs, and the Ranger tossed over two pairs of his own. The four dejected bandits slumped and humped their shoulders as they were marched out in single file to be taken to the calaboose.

"By ——!" Cardrig exclaimed. "Ranger; I can't express my gratitude!"

"Luck!" the Ranger growled out of the corner of his mouth. "You telephoned to headquarters that Rasbar was down here after Lantana. They told me, an' I come —— whooping."

"You're Rasbar?" Cardrig cried, a great understanding shining in his face.

The man was too modest to admit it, but the banker knew. Rasbar was a Ranger—the man, the mere man himself, just couldn't believe it really.

"Too bad you lost your saddle—and mule," Wathers remarked as he took the hero around to his office.

"Oh, that's all right," Rasbar grinned knowingly with the suggestion of a wink such as a Ranger may venture to give a man who has in his day himself been a Ranger. "That's all right. Cassie Saprano's a friend of mine. I knew her when she was riding rodeos. I told her she'd better ride my mule—cain't nothing hit mud like a mule. She'll leave 'im down to Wolwack's—and my saddle. But didn't that son-of-a-gun have his nerve—passing for a Ranger? Well, s'long! Hyar comes my train."

"S'long!"

Wathers shook his hand.

"Happiest days in my life were when I was a Rangeh!"

"Yeh!"

Rasbar nodded.

"Them was real days—real business then!"

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MORNING'S TIDE

by **Bill Adams**

THE night was rainy, with a low wind's sigh,
(Or distant voices!) Leaves were rustling soft;
He'd tried to rise, seeming to hear a cry,
"Roll up them topsails, now—*all hands aloft!*"

He lay there quiet at the wakening day,
A man white-visaged, with his frail hands thin;
The doctor passed. Two nurses paused to say—
"Draw back his curtains—let the sun shine in."

Morning broke wide beyond his window bed:
From flurried clouds adrift a warm shower fell.
He tried to rise, craning his eager head—
Hearing faint chimes as from some far-off bell.

They brought him flowers, flowers of the land!
Lilacs and pansies, honeysuckle sweet—
And him a plain, a common foremast hand,
Raised where the seas and clouds together meet.

They did not know the speech his kind might use,
Nor he their talk. The matron paused to say,
(He heard great ships drive by, with singing crews,)
"How nice to see you look so well today!"

He saw white-budded fields, wild broken foam
Beneath a wind. Sea blooms passed nodding by.
He who had known the sea, his only home,
Lay by an open window place to die!

"Lilacs is lovely, an' them pansies, too—
You folks is good!"—(He rose his thanks to tell).
"Hark!—I can hear the shouting of her crew!
There!—don't you hear it?—*there's a fo'c's'le bell!*"

Homeward at morning, canvas shining soft,
White o'er his prairies of the gleaming main;
"Roll up them topsails now!—*all hands aloft!*"
Sudden he heard it, and was home again.

"Look at his face! He does not look as though
He aught but slept! His smile seems breaking wide!"

"Haul away, bullies!—*blow, my bullies, blow!*"
A sailor, seaward, with the morning's tide!

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One Chinese Night

A Complete Novelette

by Gordon Young

Author of "Wrong Blood—Strong Blood," "Hurricane Williams' Vengeance," etc.

OUR money was nearly gone, and the fun had just started on the Foochow Road. Any sailor worthy of his name can spend in forty hours all he has made in the past four months; and me and Steve had slowed down considerable. And the fun for the day was just starting along the Road.

The jumbled, glittering, babbling traffic moved up from the Bund. Stout merchants, toying with fans and wearing skirts, sauntered toward their favorite tea-houses. Sing-song girls in trousers, and perched on coolies' shoulders, hurried to their engagements. Sedan chairs—in which a portly chink would be on his way to a friend's dinner, or a powdered, painted, silken-embroidered beauty with bamboo shutters open and she sitting daintily indifferent to who watched and jeered—moved along at a springy dog-trot.

'Ricksha coolies went *chop-chop*, towing fat Americans who were seeing the world.

Yankee bluejackets swung by in parties of three and four.

All races, all classes, were sprinkled there, babbling and gawking. Native policemen yelled at coolies and ran the wheelbarrow men up side streets. It was the middle of afternoon, and plebeian traffic interfered with people of fashion and leisure out to take the air. But there was a shrill, happy sing-song note even in the coolies' wrangling.

"Well, now we'll go and have our fortune told," said Steve.

For the whole forty hours he had been talking of that fortune-teller, saying that he was going back to her on this afternoon and would take me with him.

They were old friends, that half-caste dame who meddled with the future and Steve; for Steve was Shanghai-born and knew a lot of things no white man has any business ever to learn.

"I'll tell your fortune. Give me the five silver biscuits."

As he was giving me a scornful look he didn't see where he was going and nearly bumped into a bobby.

"Hey, look where you're going," I said by way of letting the bobby know that I at least was a law-abiding citizen. "It's bad luck to butt a bobby."

But the representative of the British Empire disdained even to point his nose in our direction. English cops are queer that way. They don't seem to be paying any attention at all to anything you do—until they land on you. And they even swing their clubs in a riot without seeming to enjoy themselves.

Steve stopped in front of a store to smoke a cigaret and be thoughtful. He had something on his mind. He had had it there for forty hours. Every once in a while he would lapse into one of these vacant-eyed, moon-gazing spells, like a guy that's trying to figure out why the pea wasn't under the shell where he saw the gambling man put it.

Since our money was short and it wouldn't do to get in a fight right there on the Road I had to seek entertainment in a quiet and inexpensive way. So I backed up against a wall that divided two stores

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and with a piece of blue chalk and a lot of caution I drew a figure something like a Roman 10 with a tadpole beside it; an X and a little wiggling mark on the right side of it.

Then, looking innocent as a kid that's just pinched some cookies out of the pantry, I stepped some feet off to one side and waited.

I didn't have to wait long. A prosperous-looking chink, wearing horn spectacles the size of saucers, came along with slow and easy step as if he was out to be looked at. Lots of people were going by, but he was the first to see the chalk mark. His eyes got as big as his spectacles.

The instant he stared, others who were passing began to look. And there was a chattering and squeaking.

A Sikh in a turban and khaki came running. A native cop. Then a bobby. A storekeeper poked his head out and took a look. It began to look like a baby riot. It was almost as if "A. P. A." had appeared on the wall at a Hibernian banquet.

I felt a strong firm hand on the back of my neck, and I was led off. Steve's fingers were hard as nails.

"Wipe that chalk off your hand. You're going to get killed with that monkey business if you keep on. Can't I ever leave you alone a minute without you trying to start a revolution? Do you know that runners are already hot-footing it to the mandarin over in the walled city? Do you know every Chinaman in Shanghai will be talking about this third appearance of Teeth and Tongue in the last two days?

"Why, if somebody'd seen you do that, you'd be killed as sure as a hatchet man could get to the back of your head! Monkeying with that figure in China is the same thing as falling out of the window with a stick of dynamite in your hand!"

I don't know yet much about the Teeth and Tongue sign.

The trip before when we were in Shanghai together, one night after our money had nearly all oozed away, Steve said he would show me something. So he drew that figure on a piece of paper and stuck it up on a post. In about twenty minutes even the fire department was called out.

That was in the days when Chinamen still wore pigtails, and the biggest crime a chink could commit was do something that showed he didn't want the Son of Heaven to stay on the throne.

What made the Teeth and Tongue so feared was because some of the highest officials had been caught with the sign burned on their left shoulder, just above the heart. The conspirators took that way of making sure that none of them would back out, get cold feet or give the organization the double-cross; for, Steve said, it was certain death if it was ever seen, and no explanations could save you.

"Mandarin or viceroy—if he's got that mark on him, it's off with his head if he's caught," Steve said. "Why, they take the chance because if they can upset the throne they'll put one of their own bunch on it; then they'll graft. They're not mixed up with any movement to start a republic. They are running a little private game of their own. Any way the mandarins jump, the people follow.

"Madame Hakow says this Teeth and Tongue bunch want to get in power so they can sell China out to the European countries."

Madame Hakow was his fortune-teller.

II

NOW when I had wiped my fingers on the lining of my pocket to get off the chalk dust Steve said:

"If you ever try that again I'll bounce a club off your head. Official China's more afraid of that little sign than of all the warships off Hongkong. Come on now; we'll go to Madame Hakow's and find out what's going to happen to us—next."

He gave me a queer look as he said it.

I paused to tell him what I thought of a man who would waste good money on a half-caste faker.

"Give me the five bones, and I'll prophesy," I said.

"Five knuckle-bones you'll get."

"Why go to a fortune-teller to learn that in the morning we're going back to the *Fanny Clayborn*, and for the next two months that rip-snorting old pirate of 'Blackie' Fulton will make sarcastic remarks on the seamanship of the best two mates he ever had on his deck; then if we don't burn or sink we'll spend out next wages at San Francisco and probably land in the hoosegow—as usual."

"We'll land in the hoosegow before that maybe," said Steve with a sort of under-his-breath effect, giving me another queer look and a half-smile.

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"Say, what's coming off? What's the joke? You going to pull something on me? I keep forgetting you are nothing but a yellow-belly yourself. There are times when I almost treat you like a friend."

My sarcasm may have been a little crude, but I was very young; and Steve was the best friend I had.

Steve stopped before a large red placard covered with black characters. It was some sort of theater sign. He was always trying to test out his knowledge of the signs, and now muttered to himself as if partially out of his head.

"He's trying to make people think he can read it," I explained confidentially to the English policeman that sauntered by with his eyes on a party of lean Singhalese.

The bobby gave me a slow glance full of dignity and strolled on, thumbs in belt.

"Don't be friendly with these bobbies," said Steve. "You've got to keep aloof to make 'em respect you. Or else put 'em down for the count. One thing about 'em though; they don't hold a grudge."

Which was true. Shanghai was the greatest town in the world for a sailor ashore. The French police might be a little waspish if you got over on their side of the town; but the bobbies were friendly, even when they had to beat you up.

"What did the sign-board say?" I asked.

"That the Lord gave us throats so we'd know good liquor from bad. We've just time to have a drink before we go see Madame Hakow."

"Why don't you carry her picture?"

"She is pretty at that."

"You ought to know. You've gone to her enough times."

"Right. We're old friends. That's why she trusts me."

"What the ——? Trusts you? What with? The future?"

"Don't be a grouch. Didn't she say last time, 'Look out for blue-eyed men in uniform, Stevie, my son'? And ain't we had three fights with bobbies in the last two days? Well?"

"And now won't she say: 'Stevie, my son, by my great power to peep ahead I can see that you are about to take a long trip. Ah, yes; I see water. A lot of water. Yes, you are about to take a trip on the ocean. It will be hard. The crew will be lazy. You will have many troubles. The food will be bad.' And you'll think that wonderful!"

"She is wonderful."

"If Madame Hakow couldn't tell a sailor by the cut of his jib, the tar on his palms, the tattoos on his wrist, she ought to be made to live on cucumber rind and cracked melon-seed."

"All right," said Steve with the ardor of a fanatic; "you are going with me and see what she says. You'll get a surprize. I'm going to prove that you're wrong."

"That oughtn't be hard. You weigh fifty pounds more than me. Have three inches more reach. Stand a foot higher—and are that much thicker through the head."

"I'll take a bite out of your ear."

"Which ear?"

"Your right one."

"Which is that? Speak quick!"

He doubled up his fists to see with which he could hit the hardest, then, selecting his right hand, reached out and nipped my ear; but as I was facing him he took hold of the wrong ear.

"The drink's on you!" I said.

Then Steve weighed his fists again and saw that it was so. If you make them speak quick, about half the men in the world will pick the wrong side when somebody faces them.

We found a place that was half-civilized and had a couple of bottles of English ale.

Steve looked at his watch for the twentieth time in three minutes, and said:

"Come on. It's time to go find out what's going to happen to us."

"I'll wait here. I like the bottled goods in this place."

"No you won't. Come on."

When Stephen Harper says, *"Come on"* and reenforces the meaning with a hand on your neck it is better to postpone the arguments until you can get a club. He weighs a hundred and ninety pounds in his stocking feet.

Twenty-six years before, Steve had been born in Shanghai. He knew the ins and outs of the curlicued streets. He could talk through his nose with an adenoidal inflection that would bring a wooden-faced coolie to life. Now and then he could read the sign-boards.

His father had skippered a rotten old tub that a firm of Chinese merchants kept in the trade between Manila, Singapore and

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Shanghai in the hope of some day collecting the insurance. Finally she went down at sea, and they did get their insurance. Then Steve took to the forecastle of a windjammer, and worked around to be mate of the *Fanny Clayborn*.

Whenever he got back to his home town he rested a little from the work of the sea. His idea of rest was to keep going for forty-eight hours and bring up penniless without having been nipped by a bobby.

For years this Madame Hakow had been a sort of friend. He knew her when he was a kid. He always went to see her before starting out to rest.

Now I don't know much about China, in which I merely resemble practically all the other people who have been there; but I found you can never tell what lies around the corner until you bump into it, or what

is beyond the nearest door until you stumble through and get pitched out. Just over the wall that forms one side of a dirty street where beggars doze and scratch themselves may be a cool and ancient garden, precious with potted shrubs, pools, shaded walks, Summer houses and big ugly statues that scare off devils.

Misery, majesty and mystery are huddled together in the same block, faced with ordinary-looking shops, topped by balconies, before which swing the long perpendicular signs written in gold.

Steve led me up a side street for about a half-mile, up a winding stairway for another half-mile, down through a narrow hall, out on a balcony, half-around the building, across a narrow, wabbly bridge that spanned the street, into another dark hall; then he said, "Here we are" and opened a door.

We entered a room about half as big as a piano-box. It was without windows and was lighted by a lantern. The walls were hung with strings of colored beads and sign-boards.

"Hocus pocus dingbustus."

"Shut up," said Steve. "You're having a privilege conferred on you."

"You can get a lot of privileges for five dollars in this man's town."

"Don't worry. You'll get your money's worth"—and again that queer look, and a firm accent of cryptic significance.

"If you get me into trouble I'll throw you overboard the first dark night. Just remember that when you wake up ten fathoms down."

ONE side of the piano-box room opened up by simply folding back as you fold back a screen, and a little vision in green embroidered blouse, trousers and padded slippers, with black hair coiled and twisted like a Viennese bun carved out of teak appeared before us, bowing humbly and smiling as if she had misread our pockets.

She was a dainty little Chinese flapper and said something that I didn't understand.

Steve turned to me with the air of swatting an insect.

"Madame Hakow has been waiting a long time."

"Well, if a fortune-teller don't know when to expect you, what's the use of going to her? She's not much good."

"Just you wait, my son. You'll see."

"What's the joke?"

"No joke. But I have a hunch."

"Then what you going to pay five dollars for? Spend the money right and follow the hunch."

"This doesn't cost anything. Come on."

"Oh, well, that's different," said I, somewhat relieved.

We still had a night to spend ashore.

"Come along," said Steve.

The little flapper fluttered on before, with an air of awkward daintiness, and we followed with footsteps that jarred the floor. It was one of those mat-covered, springy floors that seem about to give way with every step, yet would hold up an elephant.

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She led us into a large dim room with vases on the floor, devils and gods sprinkled about, black, carved furniture, colored silks with characters and fancy embroidery stuck all over the walls and on the tables; and some of the embroidery were dragons that looked like a cross between lions and tarantulas.

It was enough to give a timid man like me the creeps.

Miss Flapper, smiling sweetly, bowed low and backed away from us, dodging in behind a screen and vanishing.

"You do get something for your money anyway," I said, looking all around.

Then I got a jolt. Right there in front of me, just on the other side of the table, was a woman. I hadn't seen her before. I would have seen her if she had been there a half-second before.

It was a good trick. Or maybe she had come in on tip-toes while I had my head turned. Or maybe she had been hiding behind the table and simply stood up when I wasn't looking.

She was tall, with all sorts of drapery wound around her, and stood straight as a mast with an upward tilt to her face, which was marked with a faint Chinese angle at the eyes. They were black eyes, and her hair was black; but her cheeks were white as powder could make them, and her lips red as scarlet paint. She was not young. She was more than attractive. She looked like a prophetess.

"It is arranged," she said with a smile toward Steve.

They understood each other, those two.

Then she gave me a long careful look.

"My friend, Tom Mack," said Steve.

"Ah, yes. I know of him," and she gave me a shadow of a smile.

"He'll go through with anything," said Steve with an earnestness that I did not like.

Her black eyes continued to inspect me. I didn't like that either. Besides, I knew that I looked pretty rumpled about the collar, that there was a rip in my coat sleeve, that my cap had been knocked to the floor two or three times and stepped on, that there was a fresh scratch about the size of a man's knuckle on my chin. Those were great days, those were!

Her English was slow and had a faint accent, though her mother had been an American.

"You, Mr. Mack, are the second officer of the *Fanny Clayborn*——"

"Wonderful!" I said, feeling that she ought to have a little praise—since she wasn't going to charge us—for her ability to remember what Steve had probably told her.

"— and the *Fanny Clayborn* leaves tomorrow for San Francisco with tea, silk, teak and opium."

"What's that? Opium! Say——"

I looked hard at Steve, who gave me back a puzzled look.

"Are you sure of that?" I said to her.

She smiled a little, and said—

"I am sure."

It was all right for Blackie Fulton to run opium if he wanted. He owned the *Fanny*. He had only his conscience and the customs officers to look out for. But he wasn't going to have us help him—not at the wages we were getting.

Steve and I would surely look into this. We both needed bigger wages anyhow.

I wondered how Madame Hakow knew, and was just about to ask. Then I remembered that as a fortune-teller it was her business to know. And evidently she did have some kind of a gift. She said:

"All the silk bales contain opium. You and Mr. Harper were given shore leave together because Captain Fulton didn't want you to see with whom he concluded the business. He was afraid you might be suspicious. He is very careful, is this Captain Fulton."

And that old hypocrite had said he wanted his boys to go ashore and get it out of their system; "his boys" being us. He said that he believed in letting his boys have their fun in a lump. He was cheating us and making us into law-breakers. My conscience wouldn't stand for that. Not at any such salary as we were getting.

"Now aren't you glad you come?" said Steve, rubbing it in.

"I sure am. That's a good thing to know. Let's go catch the Woosung launch and get on board. If there's opium there I'm going to have my fortune told every day."

I was on my way, but Madame Hakow said, "Wait!" and raised an arm.

I knew that something important was coming. She had a way of making you feel funny. There was a trickling sensation up and down my spine, as if a couple of spiders were counting the vertebræ.

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She was looking at me, not at Steve. I thought she had missed her cue, or maybe she thought that I was in on the joke.

"Destiny waits upon this hour!"

I nodded as much as to show that I agreed with her. I was thinking of what Blackie Fulton would say. Destiny was going to sit down right on top of him.

"Before the Hung Miao there sits a beggar with gold in his left hand. Follow him. A beautiful woman waits in distress. It is written that you shall pass through peril and restore her to her native land."

I looked at Steve, then I looked at Madame Hakow—or rather I looked toward where Madame Hakow had been standing.

I felt silly. She was gone. Without sound or motion she had disappeared.

I was going around the table and have a look, just to see if she was hiding behind the silk drapery; but Steve took my arm.

"Come on. Let's go. We haven't time to lose."

"If we miss the launch we can get a sampan."

"What?"

"To get back to the ship. But how does she do it?"

"Do what? Tell things like that? It's her business."

"The fadeway. With a gift like that she'd make a great shop-lifter; and being a fortune-teller she'd know when she was going to get caught."

"Come on. We must go to the Red Temple and meet that man."

"What man?"

"The beggar."

"Not me. No. I didn't lose any beggar. I'm going straight on board the *Fanny*. I'm going down in the hold. I'm going to rip open a bale of silk—and if the stuff's not in it, you've got to help me pay for damaging cargo."

"But, Tom, come on. We have to go through with this. You come on and I'll explain," said Steve, sort of breathless.

"Now listen. I knew you and that lady was framing something on me. And listen now with both ears: If Madame Hakow was a first-class fortune-teller she would know that I don't go monkeying around pretty women in distress—not this far from home. I'm interested in the *Fanny's* cargo and——"

Just then the little green flapper appeared, all smiles and bows. She was pretty. It was no trouble at all to follow her.

At the door I would have paused quite a while to say good-by, but Steve told me it was no use. She didn't understand English.

HE TOOK hold of my arm and began to unwind our steps through the maze of halls, stairways, alleys, streets; and we brought up before another shop sufficiently civilized to keep bottled goods on ice.

"How did she find out about that opium?" I demanded with my hand on a bottle's neck, ready to soak him if he have me a hocus-pocus answer.

But he didn't.

"She knows who 's who in the contraband trade and can find out things for the asking. She's half-Chinese and stays on the Chinese side of the fence. But she knows what a time of it her mother had—that 's why she wants to help this woman get away."

"Wait a minute. *Wait* a minute. What woman? What 's going on? I'm not going to save any maidens in distress, but I'm interested enough to listen—if you talk fast."

"This is no maiden. This is the wife of a mandarin—his American wife. Her life is hell."

"It ought to be—marry a yellowbelly. Why don't she leave him?"

"Where do you think you are? This is China. She married him in the States—fascinated by his robes and manner."

"Aw, bah!"

"Don't turn your nose up quite so high, son. When a Chinaman sets out to please a woman he can just about do it—any woman. She thought it would be romantic to be a Chinese lady. Her family bucked the marriage, but she would have it. And she had it. Then she came home with her lord and master to find two other wives in her shoes—and a mother-in-law. He'd forgot to mention the fact that he already had a pair of spouses. Madame Hakow told me. The woman's ready to kill herself."

"Why don't she go to the consul?"

"What consul? A Chinaman's wife can't appeal to the American consul—not even if she could get to him. Which she can't. Can't even write letters that he don't read. In her letters home she has to pretend to be happy. Her family couldn't help her anyway. And there's also the mother-in-law.

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And one of the other wives gave birth to a son while Ti Wu Chang was over in the States—so you can see this white girl never had a chance.

"She has had fourteen months of it and means to hide herself under a lotus-leaf. You know—drown herself.

"A chink mother-in-law is a devil. And this one had a grouch against Europeans and Americans anyhow. The girl's learned just enough of the language to know that this mother-in-law says things to her that would singe the wool of a Barbary Coast nigger. Women talk that way in polite society over here—when one is the mother-in-law. You can't imagine a worse fate."

"The —— I can't! Supposing we are caught trying to kidnap a mandarin's wife? We'll be beat to death, boiled and beheaded all at the same time. Count me out! And just when we've got Blackie Fulton lashed to the mast."

"He isn't a real mandarin. He's just a rich chink that's handed out enough cumshaw to have the right to wear the robes. There's as many kinds of mandarins as a cat has lives. He's not a real official or anything. He's just rich."

"What are you trying to do? Persuade me? Say, they'd start in at our feet and shave away a hair's breath at a time till they got to our hearts. This dame visits Madame Hakow; why don't she simply go down to the American consul's and set tight? She ain't no Chinese wife if the old boy had two hid behind the scenery."

"That wouldn't make any difference—in China. Besides she couldn't get there. The chairmen that carry her sedan wouldn't take her. She's watched, guarded, spied on. But nobody thinks of Madame Hakow as anything but Chinese. She could have gone either way, but she chose the yellow. She's clever with fortunes, and it pays.

"Well, this woman came to her the first time by accident—came along with one of the wives. They aren't so bad. It's the mother-in-law. The girl just went along to be going some place.

"Madame Hakow's mother married a yellow man. She knows the life. She knows what this girl is going through. The girl's come a dozen times.

"When I showed up the other day Madame Hakow asked me if I would make the attempt to get the girl out of the country. We have to sneak her out. I said sure, that you and me would and——"

"Oh, you did?"

"Yes. And I was to come back this afternoon to see if she had been able to make the arrangements. And she had. So it's all settled."

"Oh, settled is it?" I demanded in my best sarcasm.

"Yes. It's easy. We are to follow the beggar and——"

"What about that gold in his left hand? You'll be grabbing at his right, I bet. And miss it. What's that for?"

"That's just a little present to us. It has nothing to do with the case. Over here nobody ever does anything without getting a present. I'd cut off my hand to help any American girl out of a mess like this one's in."

"A hand wouldn't be so bad. But a head—that's different. Say," I said, of a sudden full of suspicion, "have you seen this woman?"

"No. Why?"

"I thought maybe you had, that's all. You seemed so interested."

"Why, —— it, I am interested. That girl's in hell. Her life is one round of torment. And we are her only chance. Madame Hakow don't meet three Americans a year. The consuls' hands are tied, even if she went to them. Madame Hakow trusts me. I've known her ever since I was knee high. And you and me have got to get her on board the *Fanny*——"

"Blackie Fulton 'll be delighted, won't he? He'll pay us both off and leave us stranded right here with a mandarin's wife on our hands. Then who's going to sneak us out of the country?"

"That's how much you know of the way Chinese do things. The Chinese part of Madame Hakow foresaw all that, and we've got Blackie sewed up in a sack.

"When we talked it all over day before yesterday Madame Hadow said that most Yankee skippers did run a bit of opium if they had been in the China trade as long as Fulton has. She said that she would find out, and if Blackie Fulton wasn't running it then she would just go ahead herself and scare up enough money to make it worth his while. She knows what the girl is going through. Besides the girl's people are rich, and she'd send it back from the States.

"I tell you, Tom, that poor little American

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woman that come over here to be a Chinese lady and tinkle fine tea-cups is in nothing more or less than a harem. All the servants even jeer at her. The old mother beats her—imagine, a white girl being whipped by a yellow mother-in-law!"

"Yes; but, Steve! Be sensible. We can't help it. If you and me was to start helping out white girls that have made fool marriages we'd be busier than a couple of live fish on a hot skillet. And we'd soon be in just about the same fix as them fish. She was after a title—and she got it. It's up to her to take the hell that usually goes with titles."

"He isn't a real official mandarin. He just bought the right to wear the robes and——"

"That's enough. He's enough of a mandarin to have our noses slit. I don't meddle with any mandarin's wife. Not in his home town. And you don't even know what we are going up against. Follow a beggar! That's no fun. You don't even know where he's going to take us."

"Oh, yes, I do. That was all planned the other day. She's to be at the garden gate, and just after dark we'll knock. She opens the gate, and we're off. This beggar fellow is to show us the place and which gate. Madame Hakow picked a beggar she could trust."

"I wouldn't trust any of 'em. And we go running through the streets with a white girl in chink dress—and expect to get away with it!"

"Why not? All we need is ten minutes' start. Then throw her into a sedan, and off we go."

"Off go our heads, too. Just supposing we are caught; be serious, and just supposing we are caught, what's the first thing to do?"

"If we *are* caught?"

"That's what I'm asking."

"Kill the girl! Then put up a fight so they'll have to kill us outright! For God's sake, don't let 'em get us to a torture chamber."

"Yes. I thought so. That's just what I thought. And you're going up against that sort of a thing for a woman you never saw?"

"I sure am," said Steve, quiet and shutting a big fist while he gave me a look that showed he wouldn't be pulled aside or argued with.

"All right then. Lead on. Lead on. But if you was half as scared as I am we wouldn't go. I'll tell you that!"

III

I THOUGHT there must have been some sort of celebration going on at the Hung Miao. It was that noisy. But Steve told me they were just having an hour of quiet worship.

A swarm of pedlers tried to sell us incense. Another swarm of beggars whined and squawked. Letter-writers and fortune-tellers were all about. But I didn't see anybody with any yellow metal in his left hand.

We wandered around. Inside the court people on stools chin chinned their favorite gods; and there was much smashing of gongs and clapping of hands—in case the gods should be dozing and otherwise overlook their prayers.

They threw money into a box covered with a grating; for the idols, like everybody else in China, have itching palms. The grating was to keep the itching worshipers from reaching in on the quiet.

There were some tourists and sailors about, throwing away *cash* with the flourish of millionaires. It's easy to be a sport with money that comes eight hundred pieces to the Mex dollar.

Then an ugly, dirty, scabby scamp pulled at my coat and in the worst wort of pidgin English asked if we didn't want to see an opium joint or something.

There were always plenty of these jackals to carry sailors off to rotten dumps and show them the "something" for which the sailor is trimmed out of enough money to keep a pack of beggars for a year.

Steve swore at him in Chinese; and from the translations Steve has made for me from time to time I'd say that the Chinese lends itself to fully expressing a peeve.

"You son of a blind dog! Louse out of a leper's rag! Miserable rice maggot! Keep your scabby hands away!"

The fellow almost rubbed his forehead against his toes.

"My unworthy head is beneath your noble heel. I but meant to place this within the pocket of the distinguished personage."

He opened a hand and showed a wad of rag; at the same time looking sharply at Steve.

The fellow hadn't been sure that we were

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the men he was to meet, so he had experimented. He seemed satisfied when Steve said:

"It has the color of the sun. All right; give it to me."

The beggar handed it to Steve, who dropped it, rag and all, into his pocket.

"Here, just a minute," I said, pulling at Steve's arm. "That wasn't in his left hand."

"What difference does it make?"

Steve fumbled about with the rag in his pocket and brought out the coin. It was a gold American piece.

"We were to know him by this," he added.

"In his left hand, she said."

"Oh, that's nothing."

"And this fellow's no beggar," I said. "Look at his finger-nails. And the back of his neck is clean."

"Of course he isn't a beggar. I saw that. But he's the fellow all right." Then Steve started *chinning* him, asking questions; after which he said:

"He's all right. He knows what we want."

"She of the moon face awaits your coming," the beggar had said.

Then Steve and the fellow talked together again with an *ong-pong-chong* sound; and, knowing Steve as well as I did, I could pretty soon see without understanding a word of it that he had a tack in his shoe.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"We've got go over in the native city," he said, eying our guide.

The native city, or ancient Shanghai, is walled and lies to the south of the French concession. The wall is thirty feet high and surrounded by a moat. At night its seven gates are closed.

Inside the native city you are in the darkest heart of China, as far from Europe and America as if you had traveled two thousand miles inland.

No white man knew his way about in that rabbit warren, where all the streets are crooked and half of them are so narrow you can reach from wall to wall as you walk along, and a hundred and fifty thousand people are crammed and packed in a three-mile circle.

"The gates may be closed before we can get out—and the thing has to be done tonight," said Steve thoughtfully.

"And if the gates *are* closed?" I asked, very hopeful.

"We'll just have to climb for it and swim the moat."

The fellow, who had been perkily trying to catch what we saying, now said something.

"All right," said Steve; "hop along and show us where we are going. The old boy reminded me that if the Moon Flower was kept waiting too long she might get caught."

"Say, I'd have thought Madame Hakow would have told you if she knew that woman was over there in the native city."

"She's so much Chinese herself I guess she never thought it made a difference."

We went to the street, hailed a couple of 'rickshaws, and with the beggar showing the way we started off.

We didn't go through the north gate, but around to the east, not far from the water-front.

"Doesn't want Europeans to see us going through this time of day," said Steve.

The keeper at the east gate at first thought that our beggar was a professional guide, and he was not of a mind to let us in so late in the afternoon. But the beggar said something quickly in a low voice. Steve and I wondered what; but of course it would have been useless to ask as good a liar as a Chinaman what it was that he had said. But whatever it was the gate-keeper became humble as a trained dog and bowed us through.

We left the 'rickshaws and walked. It was well toward the end of the day, and almost dark.

The narrow streets were crowded. Peddlers squatted against the walls, their wares on the flagstones. Half-starved, thievishly eyed children scrambled in and out between the legs of the crowd. Idlers loafed before the stores, and storekeepers placidly smoked. We were eyed by everybody and followed by beggars.

I decided long ago that the reason they burn so much incense in China is because of the stink. It's worse than the incense. It gets into your nose until you can almost taste it. It is a sort of odoriferous aura. You find it in every city, every village. It permeates the European quarters. It clings to whatever you buy, and the customs inspectors eight thousand miles away smell it.

In the native city this odor became a downright stench. The high wall about the town, the cramped streets, crooked as a

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snake's wiggle, the congested buildings, kept cleansing winds from sweeping through; and filth was heaped about in piles and buckets. There was no sewerage. The stuff was carried out in pails and smeared over truck-gardens as fertilizer.

"There's the execution grounds," said Steve, waggling his thumb toward a bare spot of ground.

"Yes, it's well to know where it is in case we're asked to visit it."

It will take a lot of embroidered satin, elegant tea-cups, fragile as moonshine, a lot of beautiful lacquer-work and fine pottery, a lot of perfume and a whole troupe of flower-boat girls to put the romance back in anybody who has seen the raw Chinese quarter by twilight. Shadows hide the gaudy splotch of color in the shops; opium ghosts and leprous beggars flit about you with impertinent whine and fingers shaped like hooks; the narrow streets are packed with men hurrying, some to gambling-joints, some to their food, some in eager haste to get to the black smoke and ease their racked bones; and some are sweating laborers, with packs at the ends of their sticks. There is nothing more like ants than a city full of Chinamen, preoccupied in their movements, disappearing into holes, pressing on with unending numbers, indefatigable and ineradicable.

We turned into a dark pathway paved with flags; and this street was not over three feet wide. It passed along blind walls. We sidled by the people we met and were struck by the wide bamboo hats of the laborers in from the fields.

"What an ideal place for a murder," said I to Steve; and he thought that I was joking—which is the way a lot of people get credit for being brave. I wasn't joking.

Then we came to a hole in the wall, and our beggar ducked in.

"This don't look to me like the way to a garden gate," I said.

"You can't tell. And it's too late to turn back."

"Is it? Then how do you think we're going to get back later on?"

It was so dark in the narrow street that we could hardly see; but not quite so dark that the urgent beckoning of the beggar in the doorway wasn't visible—and he looked to me like an ugly devil enticing two honest but slightly foolish fellows into trouble.

"Scoot ahead," said Steve. "We're coming."

"Yes, and aren't you glad you came?"

"Go on. Go on. We won't get any place standing here."

So I went on.

IV

IT WAS so dark that we could not see where we were going; and each time I put out my foot for the next step I had an uneasy sensation of being about to fall headlong. I kept my hand against the side of the wall—that and the *plop-plop* of the beggar's feet were all the guidance that I had. It was a little reassuring to hear Steve's good, sound, heavy stride behind me.

The passage was narrow and low. I could reach across it and touch the ceiling overhead. It was hot, musty and full of the smell that is China.

Then our guide stopped, and I bumped into him, not being able to see in the dark.

He knocked on a side of the wall, and this wall opened by sliding back with a rhythmic *click-click-click*.

By what sixth or seventh sense he had known where he was in that darkness, thick enough to slice like cheese, is more than any white man can tell. I can't find my mouth without a light, and my mouth is no dainty, obscure little affair either.

As the door slipped back we peered through. This was no garden gate. We looked into a dimly lighted room—all rooms are dimly lighted in Chinatown except in festival time—with no furniture and nothing but bare walls.

"What's this?" said Steve.

"The Moon Flower awaits you here."

"All right. Just step inside along with us," said Steve, and, grabbing hold of his shoulder, pushed him into the room.

We followed.

A Chinaman within the room quickly shoved close the sliding door.

I saw Steve give a quick look behind him and frown.

The door was fastened in place by heavy wooden catches that fell across blocks. These catches were released by a lever; and the Chinaman that had closed the door unshipped the lever, which was about half as long as an oar and shaped excellently for use as a club.

"I think we're trapped," said Steve as if

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talking to himself, not very excitedly at that, and giving a slow look all around.

His opinion of the situation agreed with mine.

"This bird gets his then," I said, getting ready to make a swipe at the beggar.

"Wait—there they are—and we *are* trapped!"

Across from us another door opened, and three men entered, two of them half-dragging a woman in embroidered blue blouse and blue silk trousers; a white woman, with red hair.

Two of the Chinamen held her arms, and a third came in behind them.

This third chink was the one that had caused all the trouble. He wasn't a bad-looking fellow at all, and wore clothes such as you see in pictures of beautiful China. He was tall. His face was round and plump; and he had a nice gentle smile—like a tiger cat getting ready to breakfast on a couple of lambs.

"Oh!" cried the woman, looking from me to Steve. "They tortured the man that was to bring you to me. He told everything; then they killed him! I don't care for myself; I don't care! But you— Oh, that you men are to be killed because of me! I tried to kill him—I tried to shoot him. But he's a devil! I held the gun almost against him, and missed. He has it now in his sleeve! Oh, may God punish this yellow beast for what I have gone through—and save you!"

Ti Wu Chang listened without stirring an eyebrow. His hands were crossed and in his sleeves. He kept the smile as if it was painted on his face; and when she had stopped, he ignored what she had said, ignored her presence. He then bowed politely to us. He had good manners, that fellow. He spoke English like a college graduate is supposed to.

He said that it was a pleasure to receive the friends of his wife. He said it was a great pleasure; that it would be an even greater pleasure to entertain us in a way that was fitting.

Steve had been turning his head around and had got a look into the next room. I had taken a peek too, but Steve knew more about what was there than I did.

Then Steve, with his eyes on the Chinaman and as if talking directly to him, said—

"Son, are you on?"

It took a half-dozen seconds for his meaning to get through my head; then I answered—

"I got you!"

"All right—let's go!"

And we went.

Mr. Ti Wu Chang did have a baby revolver up his sleeve; but if he had known why Steve Harper had been made a first-mate at twenty-two the old boy would have brought along a machine-gun.

Steve worked fast. He was used to cleaning up a sulky forecastle the morning after the runners had put on board a drunken crew; and he knew, so to speak, the technique of rough-and-tumble work. As second-mate I had got a lot of good training under him.

And no Chinaman is ever a good fighter if you can get close enough to hit him with your fist.

Steve made a jump like a pier-head dive and knocked over one chink by the girl's side.

Ti Wu Chang, quick as a cat scratches, pulled the gun and shot. I saw it, and I couldn't see how he missed; but Steve wasn't touched, and the next instant he hit the chink an over-the-shoulder punch that had a kick like an electric riveter. Ti Wu Chang went down like a toy mandarin poked over by a child's finger; and he took the count. He would have took the count up to five thousand. Then Steve jumped the fellow that was swinging the door-lever, and he let go of his club and curled himself around the hole that Steve's fist put in the pit of his stomach.

There was a squeaking and squealing as when you are butchering two or three pigs at once up in the forecastle.

As for me, I planted the blow I had been saving up right alongside the beggar guide's head, and if he was able to eat for a month I bet he had to do it with somebody else's jaw-bone.

The other man that was holding to the girl let go and started for the door that was open behind him; but I was in more of a hurry than he was. Younger. Faster on my feet. Besides his pigtail stuck out as he went, and I laid hold of that. He stopped and went to sleep right on the floor. He was sleeping before he got to the floor.

Queer about Chinamen. Take a coolie that can carry two hundred pounds over his shoulder and trot along all day on a

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handful of rice and three cups of tea, and he will crumble under the smash of a fist from a fellow that hasn't a tenth of his staying-power.

"All right, what next?" said I to Steve.

Steve took the door-lever and made a jump to the wall. Then he listened. The passage outside was full of hurrying feet and chatter. Chinks had heard the sound of the fight, the shot of the gun, and were gathering.

"We couldn't make it out that way in a thousand years," said Steve.

There began a bumping and pattering, a humming noise, the squeak of rat-like voices.

"There's always a half-dozen ways out of every chink hole—if you can find 'em. Which way did you come?" he asked the woman.

She was half-laughing, half-crying. I think she wanted to throw her arms around Steve's neck. 'Most any white man would have looked good to her.

"I don't know. I don't know," she said, kind of hopeless. "I was brought here from over in the city. That's a torture chamber in there. He meant to put us all to death."

"How'd you ever get that gun?" said Steve, reaching to the floor for it.

"Oh, my young brother put it in my trunk. He said Chinamen were always celebrating the Fourth of July, and I might want to join in the noise. I thought he was joking—I thought it was a joke until the other day I looked at it, and I saw it was loaded. I—it seemed almost like a miracle, because I meant to kill him if he caught me trying to get away. But I missed him!"

"Here," said Steve, holding it out to her. "Take it, and if we get caught again—you use it—on yourself. Understand?"

She nodded but drew back from the gun.

"I do understand, but—but you keep it."

"Three or four bullets won't help us get out. The noise would just bring three or four hundred more chinks on top of us. And it's a slow death for us, all of us—if we are caught."

Then I was hit by a big idea.

"Steve, let's grab this chink. Shake him into life and make him show us the way out. If he tries any monkey business we'll finish him off first. Let him know that."

"There's something to that," said Steve. "Here, you!"

He poked the illustrious Ti Wu Chang with his foot, but the old boy never moved.

"Lord, you've put him away for keeps!"

"No such luck," said Steve. "He's heard what you said, and he's 'possuming. All right, you go with us part way anyhow!"

With that Steve laid hold of the Chinaman and carried him into the next room, with us following. And we shut the door. The jabbering and pounding outside had increased.

WE CAME into a large room with fat wooden devils squatting about on little platforms. Ugly-looking devils they were, and each must have presided over a certain kind of torture. The worst of the lot had hollow eye sockets instead of the bulbous glare that is typical of idols the world over.

All sorts of queer contraptions were about—though the little bundle of split and sharpened bamboo would have been quite enough to keep me howling as much as any Chinaman could have wished. A five-spoked wheel, large enough to strap on a man of about Steve's size, was fastened like a turnstile on a four-foot post. A charcoal brazier burned before one of the idols, or devils, or whatever they were; and long knitting-needle-shaped pieces of iron were sticking in the coals. There was a machine like a cider-press; another contraption designed to spring apart so that a man would be left suspended in air with his arms jerked from his sockets.

It was in this room that Ti Wu Chang had expected to entertain us.

"How did you get here? You know?" Steve asked the girl.

"I don't know. I was brought in a chair."

Steve had looked all about, and he saw no way out.

"The chinks are afraid to try to come in on us now—but they'll get us when we start to go out. The Chinese have a genius for messing up passages and stairs till a snake would break its back trying to take the corners. And we've got to do something quick."

He was looking toward the presumably unconscious form of Ti Wu Chang:

"If I can find a hole in the floor we'll have a chance. And there ought to be one. They've been making these halls and holes for a thousand years right here. There's bound to be a hole in the floor somewhere—and we've got to get out underground."

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I have been told—I can't say with how much truth—that Chinamen have a maze of halls and hidden doors, tunnels and dark passages to mystify and entangle the raiders of any rival tong that might feel in the mood for a little surprize attack.

Anyway there we were, as nicely pickled as a mouse in vinegar, with people outside the room chattering, screeching and calling.

Talk about a Chinaman's stoicism! In one way there is nothing more like a pack of excited monkeys than a crowd of chinks that have been stirred up; and in another they are as immobile and as inscrutable as mummies.

"How about waking up his nibs here?" I suggested, for standing around with nothing to do was making me uneasy.

There was a humming like an aroused beehive outside the room, and a rattle and squeak of voices.

Ti Wu Chang evidently believed that if he showed signs of life the chances were that we would kill him; or at best he would have to help us to escape to save his own life. And he wasn't far wrong. So he continued to lie without moving. Steve spoke to him, cussed him, prodded him; but he wouldn't stir. He was lying on his back, face up.

Our situation was a little more than desperate; it was hopeless. Sooner or later we were bound to be caught, ducking in and around the passages that led from the torture room.

"Watch me wake him up!" Steve cried; and, grabbing one of the red-hot knitting needles from the brazier, he tore loose the Chinaman's blouse at the shoulder; then, quicker than a bird could have flown across the room, he burned the Teeth and Tongue symbol on Ti Wu Chang.

Ti Wu Chang did not move. There was a flicker of expression over his face, but it passed so quickly and was so vague that I almost doubted having seen it.

"Come on, wake up—wake up!" said Steve. "You're in as much a mess as we are. If anybody sees this mark—well, word will fly about, and then it's off your head comes. Are you going to wake up?"

Steve held the hot iron poised to sear him again; but the girl cried out:

"Don't—oh, don't! Please!"

Then Steve sort of remembered that a lady was present, which he had pretty nearly forgot, being absorbed in the Chinaman.

"Steve, I think we ought to let him have his own way—anybody that wants it enough not to flinch when you burn him like that."

"All right," said Steve. "He'd double-cross us some way if we trusted him. But I give him warning right now that he'd better wake up. I'm going to set fire to this room——"

"Fire!" cried the girl.

"Set fire!" I shouted. "And burn us?"

Steve had begun stamping about, driving his heel into the floor; then he took a piece of wood and pounded with that.

"Sure, fire—if we can get out—underground. Give the—Chinaman—" he was pounding away between phrases— "something to think about—besides us. Ah, here we are!"

He was pounding the floor before the empty-eyed devil.

"It's hollow here. There's some spring or something around this wooden joss. You enter through him—I bet. I haven't time to look for the spring, so——"

With that Steve made a rush at the idol as if it was somebody who had just called him a liar. He bucked against it, once, twice, three times, and with a creaking and splintering of wood the thing reeled, rocked and gave way. The wooden devil was empty, and there were steps leading down into the hole below it.

"Some poor chink would get an awful jolt, seeing living eyes in that thing's head. He'd tell all he knew, quick."

"We don't know where this hole goes," I protested. "And they'll be piling down there after us."

"Don't worry, son. Chinatown's going to be busy as a one-armed man on an ant-hill," said Steve quite cheerfully. "That's why I wanted to get underground. The one thing that a Chinaman hates and fears is fire."

"But we don't know where we're going!" I argued.

"Right. But we —— well know where we'll go if we stay here—or if we try just to run for it. All underground passages lead to some important place. And when we are underground the —— town can burn over our heads for all we need care. You'd better wake up."

This he addressed to Ti Wu Chang, who

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really ought to be given a lot more credit than I am going to give to him for the way he persisted in pretending to be unconscious.

It must not be thought that there was no other way out than through the joss, or whatever the thing was. We saw three doors, all locked from the inside; and there was probably another, since Steve said that every wall in Chinatown had an exit of some kind. But we knew very well that if we undertook to leave by any of those doors we couldn't go fifty feet without being overpowered by numbers.

Steve took down two lanterns and gave one to me and one to the girl. Then he dumped the brazier of coals on the floor against a wall, and laid the split bamboo over the coals.

Instantly there was a flame. He then broke up some wooden objects and threw the pieces on the fire.

As the smell of smoke spread there began to be a terrific screeching and clamor on all sides; and when we saw the fire leaping more than half-way up the wall, as if eagerly taking hold of the dry wood, Steve said it was time to go. I went first, the woman followed, and Steve came last.

Above the crackling of the fire I heard him half good-humoredly telling Ti Wu Chang that he had better wake up; but the Chinaman didn't move.

We went down steps steep as a ship's ladder for at least twenty feet, almost straight down as if descending into a well.

Then the descent stopped in a narrow tunnel that was walled on all four sides with stone. The faces of the stones were large and covered with a kind of slippery slime—slimy without being really wet.

We ran along until the girl was out of breath. Then we stopped.

Steve took her lantern and, lifting it up, looked about him. He said:

"This passage is over a thousand years old, I bet. They quit doing work like this long before Columbus was born. Most of the city, I bet, has been rebuilt over this tunnel a dozen times. And if they didn't get in there and smother that fire quick they'll have to do some more rebuilding."

Whatever way we might look at the situation, we were in a bad fix. We didn't know where we were or where we were going; and if we did get out of the tunnel we couldn't go fifty yards on any street without bringing down upon us a swarm of chinks to know what foreign devils were doing within their walls at night with a woman in Chinese dress.

"Now aren't you glad you come?" I said to Steve.

"We got to be moving along fast," he said, and took hold of the girl's arm.

So we went along, but not very fast. The rocks were slippery. The air was foul. It was like being buried alive, where other people had been buried.

V

"WELL, here we are," said Steve, holding up his lantern and stopping before a big black door that looked to me as solid, as immovable, as the stone wall.

"We're here all right. From the looks of this door—no handle or anything—we're likely to stay here some time."

"Yes, maybe you're right," said Steve.

He held his light close and ran his hand over the surface.

"Bronze—and with raised figures on it. It was an important door some time. Never was meant to be opened from this side, either."

"Now I suppose," said I, "that we'll have to go back and see how our fire's going."

"Is there something wrong?" the woman asked in a whisper.

"No, ma'am. We just can't get out. But we are still safe," I said. "I bet we could yell and pound for a week, and nobody would hear us, so you don't need to talk low."

"I don't feel like talking loud," she said somewhat weakly.

"Me—I'd like to yell loud enough to be heard at the American consulate."

"Wouldn't do you any good," said Steve.

"I am to blame—oh, I am to blame!" said the woman, as if she wanted to cry.

"No, we were coming anyway," said Steve, who will be gallant no matter what happens. "This door sure is bronze—" he had his nose against it and the light against his nose—" and weighs a ton. Couldn't move it with anything less than a windlass——"

As he spoke he gave it a shove to sort of illustrate, and the door gave way about a hair's breath.

"Oh, here—here!" he shouted, getting

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excited. "It does open—ain't locked—balanced to a hair's weight and opens if you blow on it!"

As he talked he was pushing, and me too. The door wasn't the kind that could be hurried. It had to sort of be coaxed back, though it went easily enough with me and Steve leaning against it. Not a creak or sound did it make, but we could tell by the feel of it that it weighed a lot.

It opened out and left us staring into darkness.

Our lanterns didn't give much more light than glowworms.

"I wonder where we are," I said, peering hard. "Hope we don't wish in a minute that we were back in the tunnel with the door closed."

"I bet we are not far from the *yamen*," said Steve. "By the looks of this door and that stone tunnel we are around some mighty important place. But we'll never get anywhere by staying here."

We went on a few steps. Our lights fell on nothing. We held them aloft and low and swung them around and saw nothing but the floor; and yet the room seemed *alive*. It did not have the hollow, sepulchral emptiness of a deserted place.

Then the door closed behind us.

I hardly knew how I knew it was closing; for it moved soundlessly. But I did know; and, turning, I held up my lantern into the faces of three Chinamen.

My heart went flipperty-flop, and all over my body my skin was puckered with chills.

"Steve, here! Look! Trapped again!" I cried.

But Steve was busy looking at something else he had found by taking a couple of steps forward; and when I looked around to where he stood with his lantern dangling from his upraised hand I forgot about the chinks behind me. The woman moaned.

There sat Ti Wu Chang, yellow, placid, motionless; a bluish bruise on the side of his face where Steve had smashed him; his dark eyes steady, expressionless; his hands lay along the arms of his chair, and he did not move.

At once lights began to appear about the large room, and by their flicker we saw that all around us Chinamen were lined up. They stood silent and expressionless, staring at us.

"Holy jumpin' Judas!" said Steve, sort of breathless.

We had been outplayed, outgeneraled. I don't know what damage the fire we left behind us may have done. But when we disappeared down the hole into the tunnel, the Chinamen had hurried along through their maze of passages and awaited us at the only opening there was.

Steve had started the fire so that all the Chinaman, even Ti Wu Chang himself, would forget us. There is nothing like fire to scare a chink. But by luck or magic they had put it out quickly.

And they were taking no chances this time of being rushed off their feet by a couple of foreign devils. There may not have been a hundred within the room, but there were enough to smother us—and it seemed to me that there were not one, but hundreds!

"Ah," said Ti Wu Chang politely and as if sorry that the pleasure was all his, "my unworthy hospitality is again honored by your presence!"

He smiled a little, a very little. It was hard to believe that he was simply red with wrath and that no power under heaven could make him grant us mercy. And we were caught. There was no way out.

"Lady," said Steve, "you know what's coming?"

She gasped and nodded.

"They'll cut off your fingers and burn 'em before your eyes. Then your toes. After that the real torture begins. They'll save you till last. Me and Tom here first, then you."

Said the chink, cool and soft—

"You have an understanding of the ways of pleasure."

"Right," Steve came back at him. "I know your kind of pleasure."

Ti Wu Chang was in no hurry to have his pleasure over with. He had all the time in the world and wanted to sip our pain. Make it last.

But Steve knew how to play the losing game. We didn't have a show. But he could save the girl from torture, put a bullet in Ti Wu Chang, bump me off and follow with a hole in his own head. It was a small gun, but held six shells and had been fired twice.

"All right—let's go!" he cried; and, jerking out the gun, he shot fast.

The girl screamed as he pointed it point blank at her breast and fired; then he flashed once at the chink, and with almost

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the same movement wheeled and banged at the side of my head.

I was knocked over and wondered for a minute if I was really dead or what? I felt like I had been scalped by lightning. I smelled burned hair. All about the room the chinks were squealing and ducking.

I looked up at Steve, who was staring like a fool, looking from the gun in his hand to Ti Wu Chang, who sat calm as if painted on the chair; then to the girl, who was slapping her breast to put out the smoldering cloth, burned by the flash; then at me, who had the side of my head singed.

The woman's young brother, who put the gun into her trunk, had loaded it with blanks. He knew that Chinamen held a lot of noisy celebrations—it was Chinamen who invented firecrackers—and he had given to his sister the sort of present that he himself would have appreciated for a noise-making occasion.

Steve looked absolutely fool-struck.

Then he threw the gun at the floor.

"All right," he said to Ti Wu Chang, "start in. We'll put on a show for you!"

Steve was so angry that he didn't know he was being brave; and the Chinamen didn't know it either, for one of the things that a Chinaman does better than anybody else is to let himself be killed without making a fuss. Death isn't one of the things that a chink is afraid of. I'll say that for him. I've been to executions and seen a lot of them get their heads cut off with as much indifference as getting their nails trimmed. Yet they dodge and squeal and scatter and chatter as much as other people if a fight starts.

Ti Wu Chang had the slow deliberation of an automoton rather than a man about to revenge himself for a terrible injury.

I saw his hand go slowly up to his shoulder, to where the blouse was torn and where we had branded him—and I realized that we had branded the wrong shoulder! It is an easy thing to mistake the other fellow's right side for his left when he faces you, and that is what Steve, being in a hurry, had done. Luck, of a kind, had been with Ti Wu Chang; and our punishment would be none the less.

"Great God!" cried Steve, seeing the same thing as I had noticed. "We burned the wrong shoulder!"

Ti Wu Chang smiled a little and nodded faintly, his eyes steady as the eyes of a wooden devil. Then he spoke to some chinks and they came at me. I, as the least important of those to be tortured, was to get mine first.

The chinks came up with an air of importance; and we mixed it. Steve came right into the scramble head first, and for a minute or two I bet those that looked on couldn't see anything but Chinamen on their way to the floor—a stone floor it was.

I put up as much of a fight as there was in me. I didn't want the soles of my feet to be shaved off, then tickled with a feather; I didn't want to have the bones in my feet and arms broken, then be prodded with sticks while I lay on the floor and couldn't crawl. No.

And Ti Wu Chang didn't want my head beat in or my heart carved out, or anything so crude as that, so those chinks had to smother us. They did it, though we put on a show that they'll talk about to their grandchildren. My knuckles were raw to the bone. There were chinks crawling and limping all about the place, and some held their heads as if they had the toothache, and some held their bellies as if they had eaten some green fruit or something.

They weren't very gentle after they got me down. Every chink in the room seemed trying to find a place somewhere on me to set himself; and I couldn't wiggle, not even a toe.

Then they tied me hand and foot and neck, winding me around until I looked like a mummy and felt like I was being squeezed by a couple of boa constrictors.

All this time Ti Wu Chang looked on without a frown or smile. He had known how it had to end, and he was patient. If he had yelled or cussed or said something I could have stood it better; but anyhow I had to stand it.

"Cut off his eyelids," said Ti Wu Chang as pleasantly as if telling them to pass more rice to his favorite guest.

Then he repeated it in Chinese. He had wanted me to know what was coming; and I shut my eyes just as tight as I could, and squeezed them, lying there rigid and in agony, braced, expecting every second to feel those yellow fingers pulling at the lashes, drawing out my eye-lids before the edge of a knife.

And nothing happened. No one touched me. Suddenly the room seemed very quiet.

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I OPENED my eyes and twisted over on my side to take a look.

Every chink in the room was standing humble, with eyes down, and was backing up against the walls.

Even Ti Wu Chang had been stirred out of his chair; and he was standing and bowing and bobbing slowly up and down, mostly down, before a little old man who wore a cap with a coral button on top of it, and whose blouse was blazing with embroidered designs of birds of some sort.

He had a little mustache like two rat-tails and a bit of a beard, thin as a goat's whiskers; and his eyes had a steady, tired, wise, incurious look. People were with him. His feet were in thick slippers.

He came well into the room and looked about with no appearance whatever of even being interested; but I could tell that every man in the room was full of awe and humbleness.

Had I been on my feet and free I would have felt the same way. That little old man had the something in him that makes Men among men, whatever their color.

He was the mandarin of Shanghai, with the power of life and death in his nod; an arm of the emperor, high in authority, wise, shrewd, schooled by years of work to see through all the craft and guile of the craftiest people on earth.

A mandarin knows everything that is going on in his district; if there is anything going on that he doesn't know about, the people who should have kept him informed are likely to lose their heads.

He knew when Ti Wu Chang tortured the guide who was to have taken us to the gate; he knew when Ti's white wife was brought to the torture chamber; he knew when us foreign devils were taken there and when and how we escaped; he knew when Ti Wu Chang hurried through the maze of passages and waited our coming from the tunnel.

But why he, among the highest of mandarins, chose himself to come in person only he himself could have told. Perhaps he did not trust the messengers he might send; perhaps his wish was to humble Ti Wu Chang and quickly end the matter.

I have heard it said that he was an honest mandarin, poor, not given to squeezing bribes, ruthless in his justice but just.

Ti Wu Chang stepped aside from before the chair, almost scraping his nose on the floor, and the mandarin took his seat in the dragon chair. Then he said to Ti Wu Chang—

"Since when has the Son of Heaven empowered you to administer justice within the walls of this city?"

Ti Wu Chang's forehead bumped the floor.

"Most noble father of the people, these foreign devils were beneath the notice of one so exalted as yourself. It is the lowest of the household who kill the rats. My wife, whom in an unlucky hour I honored among white women, has been a woman without honor. These men are devils that defile my name. They have sought to kill me. They have tried to set fire to the city. They, being but worms of foreign devils, were unfit to be brought to the eyes of you, beloved of the Son of Heaven!"

The little old mandarin nodded slowly just as if he believed all that. I thought that he did and that our last chance had gone glimmering. He looked around at us as if, since we had been mentioned, he might take notice of us, then again faced Ti Wu Chang, who respectfully kept his eyes down.

"True, all true. And if death came to them what does it matter that the guns of fire-ships would rock our walls to the ground? That we would be squeezed to pay a million yen for their worthless lives? My friend would have had his belly full of happiness in watching them die.

"And some of you whispering liars have talked. It comes to me that you have had unworthy thoughts. It is said—oh, falsely of course—that you have taken part in the vile rites of evil men. That I may henceforth put all these maligners of your good name to confusion, here before all bare your left shoulder!"

My heart gave another flipperty-kick and stopped. I wanted to groan. I figured it in a flash that the old mandarin had a dislike for Ti Wu Chang, and was using a tip that one of his spies had brought in to him to flatten this fellow out. And we had branded the wrong shoulder!

Ti Wu Chang bowed low. He knew when his stars had got twisted and he had lost the game; and he took his bad fix like the good gambler that every chink is. He could no more refuse or hesitate than a man that is fallen off the roof can stop before he hits the ground.

When he stood up his shoulder was bared;

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his left shoulder; and there was the mark of the Teeth and Tongue.

Had Steve not exposed the wrong shoulder we would have seen it, for Ti Wu Chang was a branded member of the terrible order.

The Chinamen about the room began to jabber excitedly as they stared toward the marks on Ti Wu Chang's shoulder.

"Pass these people out of the city," said the old mandarin without even looking toward us.

Of course at the time I didn't know what he had said, and I was pretty much scared when I saw Chinamen coming at me again; but Steve said it was all right; and so it was.

We were cut lose from our bindings and led away.

I took a glance backwards as we went; and the last I saw was Ti Wu Chang standing humbly, head bowed as if awaiting the fall of the sword that was sure to come before dawn.

VI

STEVE and I tried to get the woman to go to the consul's. She was free now. She didn't have any husband. The consul would help her. But no. She wanted to get out of the city, out of China, just as soon as possible. She said she wouldn't leave us. She believed we were good luck for her, and that she had not had much good luck in her life.

So it came about that Steve, being a gallant man, gave way.

We got a sampan and went out to the ship, coming alongside just about sun-up.

Blackie Fulton was on deck. He was always on deck, that old pirate. He looked over the side and saw his two handsome mates with a Chinese girl, and you could have heard his remarks over in Manila if you had been sitting on the sea-wall listening.

It was easy to buy Chinese girls, and we wouldn't have been the first white men that had invested in a slave.

He said a lot of things that he oughtn't to have done; which of course made it easier for us, since he was going to have to take them back as soon as we got on deck.

Then he saw it was a white woman, and Captain Blackie backed away and got so excited that he spit on the deck.

"This lady's been held by chinks, and we're takin' her home on the *Fanny*," said Steve.

"What in the blasted bedeviled gosh-darned whilley-me-wiggle!"

Captain Blackie didn't say that, but he said something almost like it, only worse.

"I won't have no chink women——"

"Shut up," said Steve.

The old man wouldn't have had a mate two minutes that wouldn't talk back to him, and Steve was a great talker-back.

"Shut up and be respectful. And say, listen—" Steve grew confidential— "if you put her ashore she'll go to the consul, and the consul may cable to San Francisco something about some *silk* you are carrying——"

"Silk?" said Blackie with a cross-eyed expression.

"She knows about it. Being among the chinks that way, she has learned things."

"Knows about what?" said Blackie, bluffing hard.

"That me and Tom Mack is going to have our wages raised, because any captain and owner that can carry *silk* can afford to pay. And she wants her passage for nothing to San Francisco."

"And here for two days I've been doing all the work while you loafers bum around in Shanghai taking it easy—and this is gratitude!"

"No," says Steve; "it's business. And this is a lady. She ain't no chink's woman. I don't know her name, but you'd better apologize because she knows all about that *silk*——"

"What are you taking about anyhow?" says Captain Blackie, swelling up. "What are you talking about?"

"Opium," says Steve.

And that ended the argument—in our favor too.

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INDIAN MEDICINE-MEN

by **Josiah M. Ward**

THE generally accepted belief that all Indian medicine-men were impostors should in fairness be qualified. It does not seem probable that a race that produced men able to treat successfully all but mortal wounds, or men and women deeply skilled in the medical properties of herbs and bark, could not also be able to produce men capable of coping with ordinary symptomatic diseases.

It is easier to believe and more compatible with the known facts that the medicine-men were shrewd fellows who utilized the howling and thumping and the beating of a drum, and all the other mummery which accompanied their ministrations, to impress their patients and auditors, with their own importance, trusting that the herbs and other stuff they forced upon the sick person would effect a cure.

The early day trappers and frontiersmen have left us some remarkable records of successful Indian medicine treatment.

W. M. Boggs relates a story about Colonel William Bent of Bents Ford which will serve the purpose of this contention—that among the Indians a man often arose who reasoned from effect to cause and cured physical ailment in a rational manner. Mr. Boggs said:

"William Bent's life once was saved by an Indian, a Cheyenne, called by the white men of the fort the 'Lawyer.' I do not know his Indian name. I never saw him but once; that was at the Cheyenne village at the Big Timbers in the Winter of 1844. He belonged to a band of the Cheyennes who lived some distance away. William Bent was living in his lodge in the village close by the lodge of old Cinemo, where the goods were kept, and I stayed in that lodge in charge of the goods.

"Bent had contracted a severe cold and sore throat—putrid sore throat. It became so bad that he had ceased to swallow food and could only talk in a whisper. His throat closed and his wife fed him with broth by taking a mouthful and squirting it through a quill which she forced down his throat.

"I went into his lodge to see how he was and he told me by writing on a piece of slate that if he did not get relief soon he was bound to die, and that he had sent for an Indian doctor called Lawyer.

"The Indian came while I was there, an Indian without any show or ornamentation about him. He proceeded at once to examine Bent's throat by pressing the handle of a large spoon on his tongue, just as any doctor would do. On looking into Bent's throat he shook his head, got up and went out of the lodge. He returned very soon with a handful of small sand burrs. They were about the size of a large marrow-fat pea, with barbs all around as sharp as fish hooks and turned up one way.

"He called for a piece of sinew and lump of marrow grease. Next he made five or six threads of the sinew and tied a knot in one end of each, took an awl and pierced a hole through each burr and ran the sinew through it down to the knot. Then he rolled the burr in marrow grease until it completely covered over the barbs of the burr, took a small flat stick about like a Chinese chop stick. Cut a notch in one end, wrapped one end of the sinew around his finger and placed the notched stick against the burr.

"He made Bent open his mouth and forced the burr or ball down his throat the length of the stick and drew it out, and repeated that three or four times, drawing out the dry and corrupt matter each time, and opened the throat passage so that Bent could swallow soup, and in a day or two was well enough to eat food. Bent told me that he certainly would have died if that Indian had not come to his relief. The Indian was laughing while he performed the operation.

"He was the most unassuming Indian I saw among the Cheyennes, but was considered by all the whites who knew him to be the shrewdest Indian belonging to the tribe. No medicine would have had any effect in removing these obstacles in Bent's throat. It had become as dry as the bark on a tree, and but for this simple remedy Bent would have died."

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Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

A VERY few words from Gordon Young in connection with his story in this issue:

"One Chinese Night" is based on Shanghai as I knew it in the later part of the 1900's.

As for the life of a white woman with a Chinaman—no doubt some of the marriages are happy. I have known two white women that married Chinamen; one killed herself; the other killed the chink.—GORDON YOUNG.

WAS it a battle or a massacre at Wounded Knee?

Kamloops, British Columbia.

I have just finished reading E. A. Brininstool's account of the killing of Sitting Bull in the January 20, 1923, issue. He says.

"This was the forerunner of the real war which followed on December 29th known as the battle of Wounded Knee—probably the last Indian war to be fought in the United States—in which nearly one hundred and fifty of the Sioux—men, women and children—were slain while the loss to the troops was some thirty killed and as many more wounded."

During the Summer of 1919 I spent some time on the Pine Ridge reservation on which is located the Wounded Knee "battle-field." I talked to several old-timers there and they all agreed that it was not a battle but a massacre. They say the Indians moved off the reservation and the regiment was sent to bring them back. After some parleying the Indians agreed to return to the reservation and gave up all their arms. That the only man among the Indians who had a gun of any kind was a half-breed. After starting back to the reservation, they stopped to camp the first night on Wounded Knee Creek, the Indians being entirely surrounded by the soldiers and through an accident the gun belonging to the half-breed was discharged and the soldiers turned upon the unarmed Indians and shot them all down.

The people who told me this all seemed to be very much afraid of getting into trouble with the Government if it was known that they had talked.

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I do not know if it is true or not, but I am quite sure that the people who told me believed that it was. One of the men claimed to have been with the soldiers at the time and claimed it was done in revenge of the Custer massacre. I wonder if any of the Camp-Fire can give us the facts.—JAMES RALL.

DID you know that when "The Gray Charteris" came out in book form Robert Simpson dedicated it to you who read it first in our magazine? To you and some others. This is how the dedication reads:

To the men whose tireless feet have carried them, through all the ages, along the Lonely Road that is without end. . . .

To the women of the wistful eyes who have lingered beside this road for a little while, shielding their sight from the blinding glare upon its rugged length. . . .

Alike to the infant who adventures head first into the coal scuttle, as to the numberless hordes that have groped their way into the black heart of an unknown continent. . . .

To all the restless, insatiable children of Adventure is this book respectfully dedicated. For they will surely bend the ear to listen and believe.

That means you, doesn't it? And rather a good picture of adventurers in general.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Orville Leonard rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

New Canaan, Connecticut.

The friendly hand you all hold out is a heart warmer. Well, I have a blackened old pipe, burned away 'round the rim, so I'll fill her up and sit in.

AFTER many years of business life, which was always drudgery to me and wouldn't be interesting to relate, I lit out for the desert mountains. Mining took me there, and I had the usual tenderfoot luck. I learned to swing a single-jack (and incidentally, to pound my thumb), to cook sourdoughs, mend my boots and wash my clothes. I went broke, for somehow that El Dorado of mine wouldn't pay any dividends. Then I drifted over into the placer country, where cattle ranged through the chaparral which now hides old surface workings. I did some placering, the way the old boys did it in '49; I worked for three months at that in the rainy season, in water nearly to my knees, from early morning till dusk, and as that labor yielded two of us but $24.95 in gold, it all went for grub: then we went away from there.

BUT I did find another sort of gold that is priceless—gold that lies all over the land on the surface, and all I had to do was use my eyes and ears to gather it in. Somehow, the West stirred me as no other country ever had—and perhaps it was in my blood, for my mother was a '49er—so I saw the land with the eyes of imagination and started writing of what I saw and heard. And when I could, I'd steal away from work, swing upon a bronco and explore the trails, for, next to my own kind, I love a horse, and have ridden always.

Well, that's about all. I've lived alone in the desert mountains, and I've lived in a '49er's cabin in the placer hills, with no neighbor in sight; but I haven't experienced many hair raising adventures, though I've heard a lot of them from old-timers; and if the Camp-Fire can hold the stillness of absorbed interest when I'm yarning that I do when reading some of their tales, *'sta buenol*

Here's a hearty hand-grip for all the boys, and I'm mighty glad to be one of you.—ORVILLE LEONARD.

THE Pan-American railroad, to connect North and South America. Something about if from E. F. Test:

Omaha, Nebraska.

I've read Mr. Edgar Young's pathetic story of the "Culebra Cut" with the greatest interest. The story is in marked contrast to the cut as it is now. If you ever go to see it, go from December 15 to May 15—the season when there is no rain and take your lighest Palm Beach Suits (one or more white suits for evening wear) with you, and take a ride through the Canal. It will repay you. If you want to see the awful tax on human life the French paid for their attempt to dig the Canal, take a ride by the old Panama Cemetery on the way between Panama and Balboa—*but don't stop on the opposite side of the Street.* Mr. Young will tell you why. Can you induce him to write *Adventure* on the necessity of connecting the Zone and South America east of the Andes by rail (at once for the former and ultimately for the latter)—with the railways of the U. S. and Central American and Mexico's?

A friend tells me that with the adjustment of the Colombian treaty, it will arouse effort into completing the railroad gap in Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica to Panama—and from thence into South America, as indicated. The time by rail would then be six or eight days between New York and Buenos Aires and less to Rio de Janeiro. It now takes about two months at times to reach the River Plata (in Paraguay) from New York (by vessel), while a railroad train could cover it in six or eight days at the maximum. The Latin American foreign commerce amounts to three billions or more annually and Germany and Great Britian are trying to get it.—E. F. TEST.

THE above was sent to Edgar Young and here is his reply:

Brooklyn.

I was much interested in the letter from Mr. Test. It's a rough neighborhood he mentions on the other side of the street inhabited by painted ladies from all parts of the world.

MR. TEST states both cause and effect when he mentions the Pan-American Railway to connect North and South America. This has been worked on for over thirty years and some men have devoted their lives to this idea and have died for it. The amount of the Latin American trade has caused its defeat up to the present. Germany and England were rivals for the Latin American trade, but as the U. S. wanted a part of it they both put up a solid

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front, especially against a railroad running lengthwise down through Central America and on into South America. Diplomatic battles have been fought, cunning used, petty bribery resorted to, grafting carried on, and men sent from both Germany and England to knock any new link of this road in the head. This is the truth. France was a rival, but she worked, be it said to her credit, on honest lines trying to make her goods better and more to the liking of the people, packing better, flattering. But her men played a fair game all the time. I'm not saying this as anti-English sentiment. It's the truth.

I have worked for several of the variously separated links all the way from Uruguay to the west coast of Mexico. I never will forget one time I was going to one of their camps in Uruguay. I had heard that there were big positions to be picked up and I went over. As I went into the camp I met an old American negro coming away. I asked him why he was leaving.

"There ain't no ding-dong," he told me.

"What do you mean?" I inquired.

"They ain't had no payday for eight months but they been grubbing us. Now they ain't got money enough to feed us."

I turned and left with him.

IT DOES really take a long time to get up the Plate (as English call it) to Asuncion, Paraguay. It isn't so long a trip to B. A., and a man can usually get there in a couple of weeks, possibly less now, but by the time he catches a river boat and gets up the river it will be all of two months.

With Germany out of the running it may be that the Pan-Americano both north and south of the C. Z., will be completed, but for my part I don't look for it any time soon. Central America is a sort of American Balkans and few people in this country are aware of the deadly rivalry of several countries for the good will of these people. It started long ago. England crowned a negro "King of the Mosquito Coast" with great ceremony, an incident which is the most laughable of history. They then got him to cede a great part of what is now Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica to them. They took him to Jamaica to try and educate him but he got away the first night and they found him the next morning in the top of a high tree. This is no joke. It's history.

If the American business men realized the importance of this Pan-American road they would pitch in and build it, cost what it may. But some day some man will be born big enough to put it over for their benefit. And even now tiny links are being built constantly in all the countries. Chili has made big strides. Brazil is doing something. But she's a hard game and goes little by little and with much effort. And propaganda and publicity won't help it much. In fact, it might have the other influence.—EDGAR YOUNG.

Well, I'm taking the chances on publicity's doing more harm than good. Mr. Young knows the situation far better than I, but these two letters are interesting reading, a railroad connecting the Americas is needed, and, well, darn it, why not say so right out loud? Whatever the twistings and turnings of diplomacy, there isn't likely to be any such railroad until there's sufficient general demand for it, and one way of creating that demand is to remind people of the need of it.

In a later letter Mr. Young tells me the Mosquito King incident is covered in "Filibusters and Financiers," by William O. Scroggs, Professor of Economics and Sociology in the Louisiana State University, published by Macmillan, 1916, Chapter IX. In the same book the author quotes from "Guatemala, or the United Provinces of Central America," by Henry Dunn, concerning the coronation of a native as King of Mosquitia in 1825, a rather amusing picture. Mr. Young says, also, that the book gives a good angle on William Walker.

CONCERNING his story in this issue, something from Thomson Burtis, who, by the way, is no longer with the U. S. Army Air Service but prowling around in Mexico for material and, I think, excitement:

Hunter, New York.

The climax of the story is built in general on what happened in Hardin County, Kentucky, the first week in December. Some prohibition officers went after the Ballards, whose leader is known far and wide as "Bad Bob" Ballard, and two of them got shot dead as ——. They went back, got a posse of a hundred men, and after three days found themselves with six men killed, as I remember it. Bad Bob—sounds like Diamond Dick, but I'm quoting name and incidents from the Louisville papers—escaped them, but later, through an ambassador of the clan, gave himself up on somewhat his own terms. He had been shot in the foot, and single-handed had defied the whole gang in the mountains for three days, and the Ballard clan had been doing it for weeks.

In connection with this incident the prohibition officers at the end were making arrangements for planes to do just the kind of thing that I've included in the story. You can also find that on the front pages of the Louisville papers. Had Ballard not surrendered as he did, my own squadron, the 88th, would probably have been doing something of the kind of work I include in the yarn. Public sentiment and action in Kentucky towns near by were approximately as I have described in the story.

THE rest of the story is built largely on conditions I either know or have heard of first-hand. The character of the mountain doctor with the hospitals, drug stores, country-wide reputation, etc., is taken bodily from life—the original has his hospitals and drug stores in Oak Hill and Beckley, West Virginia, and during my stay there in connection with the Mingo mining war I got real freindly with him. There is nothing exaggerated in the character—except for name and appearance and location he's right from life. If the story is ever published

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I'm going to send it to him, for some of the things he told me are in it.

The "taxi" war happened in a milder way, and the character of the sheriff was suggested by a man who practically runs a portion of —— County, West Virginia. I could account for practically every important detail in the yarn, but it isn't important, I guess. Suffice it to say that I've toned things down rather than up. The *Calhoun-Chatfield* feud is taken from the oldtime feud of the Hatfields against some other family whose name I forget, but the thing ran thirty years and started over a chicken or something of the kind. As to possibilities of things being as crooked as in the story; politically—the political boss of —— is my authority for that part.

One more thing I might mention. The opening scene in the rough hotel is taken from the Alamac in St. Louis, where all the burlesque shows stay. If you haven't seen the Alamac on professional night you haven't seen anything.—THOMSON BURTIS.

IF YOU should like to have the original painting for a cover that may have pleased you we should be glad to have you bid upon it. No bid of less than ten dollars per cover considered. Send in your bid any time. Covers will be sent express collect to highest bidders about July first.

"UNCLE FRANK" HUSTON rises in our midst over two points in what one of you said at a former Camp-Fire:

San Diego, California.

Will you kindly, in justice to the old Top. Sur. U. S. A., correct the following from March 20th issue of '21 *Adventure*?

"Went through the Beckwith Pass in California (named after Jim Beckwith) and settled on the Feather River about sixty miles from the town of Oroville, California, now on the Western Pacific R.R., near a little town called Springville. Adeline Carson had no children of her own. She adopted two half-breed Indians, a boy and a girl, brother and sister, whose father and mother were killed by Mexicans.

"Mr. Frenan told me the girl married a rich miner and went to Sacramento, California. The boy married a Spanish girl and ran cattle on the Feather River. Adeline died *on the ranch in the* Feather River Cañon at the age 34. Dr. Calvin also died at the ranch, so I think that will clear up the mystery of Adeline Carson."

Beckwith Pass was *not* named for Jim "Beckwith" or Beckwourth the mulatto "scout" who lived with the Crow Indians but after a Lieutentant Beckwith, U. S. Army Topographical Engineers, who discovered and surveyed the Pass in the later forties or early fifties. Verification in Records War Department, Washington, D. C.

And if anyone can find room for a "ranch" in Feather River Cañon, he beats the birds who have to fly through it without stopping. After vain years of effort to put a trail through the Scotch engineer Teddie did succeed in running the W. P. Ry., through it although A-1 Engineers say even today "It can't be done. Yes, we know the road is through, but it cannot possibly be." I was there five years ago.—MANJI.

SOMETHING from Stanley Johnson in connection with his story in this issue:

Nashville, Tennessee.

I have used the term "tarantula" in the generic sense only, much as I used "spider," and do not refer to the *Lycosa tarantula*. The consensus of opinion as to the mortality from bites of the tropical *Mygale* is about equally divided, even conservative authorities admitting that a few species do cause suffering and occasionally death. (See The Americana.) Under any circumstances, death from poisoning is so largely determined by individual idiosyncrasy that in the jungle we learned to avoid even the more harmless species. A white man in the tropics is seldom in the physical condition to withstand dangerous infection from even slight causes, and a fingernail scratch became to us matter for concern and immediate attention. *Egdon's* father in reality lived several days after being removed from the gallery, but dramatic effectiveness seemed to demand a shortening of his suffering, for it was the effect on his son that I wanted to show. So far as I know, he may have been living under the same fear that later killed *Egdon;* at any rate, there is no doubt that the horror of his position abetted the poison.—STANLEY JOHNSON.

BEEN making a mistake. Been saying that only fifty-four and a fraction per cent. of our population is of white American parentage. 55.3 is the correct figure by the census of 1920. Not that the mistake makes much difference.

In round numbers, there are 14,000,000 who were born in foreign countries, 16,000,000 of foreign parentage, 7,000,000 of one foreign parent, 11,000,000 negroes, Indians, Chinese and Japanese—47,288,663 total.

BEFORE the Senate Committee on Immigration the representative of the National Association of Manufacturers testified that the United States is dependent on foreign labor for development. By the 1920 census there were 105,710,620 people in the United States. There are more than that now. If a country with 106,000,000 people is dependent upon foreign labor for "development," then "development" is going too fast already for the number of people and there is something radically wrong with the method of "development." *Why* is it dependent on foreign labor when there are 106,000,000 to draw on? What is "development" trying to do? Is it considering the real needs of the 106,000,000 people or is it merely trying to "develop" along lines that will bring much money to the "developers?"

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The contractors, steel operators, mine operators, railway men all told how badly they needed common labor. One representative said that unless they could get more cheap foreign labor "people would quit buying goods at the high prices required to be asked because of high wages of production due to an extent to high wages for common labor."

THESE gentry feed us with a lot of that kind of plain common or garden bunk. What does he mean "required to be asked?" Required for what? Does he mean just so the few who continue to grow extremely rich from these industries can go right on growing extremely rich by charging the people too much above cost? Why not cut the profits of the few a little? *Must* they have so fat a margin of profit? Have they come to consider this fat margin so much their inviolable right that they unhesitatingly put it above the welfare of their country as a whole? Why should a few be allowed to betray the best interests of the country as a whole for their own personal profit?

If their industries have become so blamed unprofitable, why, let them retire on their past profits and turn their industries over, at less than par value, to the people's government. Public ownership or control has its drawbacks, but the people would probably be willing to take a chance. It can't give them a worse deal than private ownership of coal and railroads have been giving them.

Special industries can bring up a host of specious and wonderful pleas (and without ever even mentioning their real reason, which is the filling of the pocketbooks of the few), but they can't bring up one single argument that can stand a minute against the facts that this country has already taken in more foreign-born than it can rightly absorb and that to add still more before we have thoroughly absorbed what we have is going to spell disaster. Disaster so big that these same few crowding so greedily to the trough will be swept away, along with the economic structures they have reared and through which they fatten.

WHY beat about the bush? The world is swept with a vast wave of discontent against the present rule and methods of capital, against our present economic system. It isn't a peaceful wave, either. Unless the path is cleared for peaceful lawful means of change, change will be brought about by violence and the overturning of law. We can't prevent the change. The wave is too big. We may not favor the change, but we'll get it anyway. All we can determine, at best, is How and to what extent shall the change be made? Shall we let wild-eyed radicalism turn itself loose on us, or shall we ourselves effect enough essential, lawful changes to prevent the violence method? Shall we leave ourselves open to communism, or shall we adopt a saner, more moderate system and thereby take from it its chief reasons for existence? Do you want to be kicked all the way, or walk half-way of your own accord?

If this country is to face problems like that, the thing we need least is any increase whatever in our unabsorbed foreign population.

Stop immigration.

ON THE occasion of his first story in our magazine Townsend Boyer rises and introduces himself in accordance with Camp-Fire custom:

Indianola, Mississippi.

I am one of those who "must only long" for the great adventures. And, believe me, I know what it is to see Japan, only in the iris in my lily pond or in the highflung, rugged outlines of the cypress trees so suggestive of Japanese sketches, to jump out of a warm bed at midnight at the first call of the wild geese—a call that penetrates my deepest sleep—and to follow them, in my heart, as they "honk like hounds across the sky" clear from the Arctic circle to the Gulf of Mexico. I know what it is to stand in the museums, seeing the great African game specimens, the Jivaru heads from the Amazon, the chieftain regalia from the Solomon Islands and live in imagination the adventures of those who brought these hither.

AND I know what it is to have seen the old Delta give way to the new. In the days before successful leveeing the periodic overflows of the Mississippi made of much of the Delta for months at a time a vast inland sea. For this reason this section remained until about twenty or thirty years ago one of the hinterlands of America. But progress—and to me progress is a case of eating the seed corn of the nation's resources as often as it is an addition to the nation's wealth—inevitably invaded the Delta. The vast tracts of virgin timber have been slaughtered, now a crackerbox bungalow of cypress lumber costs as much as a section of land formerly did. Cotton, that formerly grew in the fresh soil literally like Jonah's gourd and was so prolific that it was never possible to pick the entire crop but was plowed under in the Spring, is the coddled pet of Government experts who are trying to teach it how

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to grow early and fruit in Summer in order to keep the boll weevil from getting both halves of the crop.

WITH the disappearance of the forests and the drainage of the lakes and bayous went the refuges of the wild life. Not only is the wild life practically gone, but the old-time type of negro—not the idealized *Uncle Remus, Aunt Jemima* sorts, but those who were neither good nor bad, but withal, dearly beloved by the old-timer, for together they endured the hardships and enjoyed the thrills while conquering the wilderness of the Delta. On the fringes there are yet to be found remnants of the past such as *Chuc-a-luc* and *Sassoman* in the "Soul of the Catfish," but on the whole progress has laid a heavy hand upon the Delta—and my heart.

Now Camp-Fire comrades, in all this jambalaya of emotions, I hope you can see my heart as it is—striving to keep itself from yearning for the great diapason of the universe and to find contentment in a country town. And where can I find a greater aid to this end than in that gathering of congenial spirits around the Camp-Fire?—TOWNSEND BOYER.

SO MANY letters have come from comrades bitterly denouncing the proposed anti-weapon laws that if all were printed there would be nothing else in "Camp-Fire" for months to come. So I'm taking specimens pretty well at random, though the following is chosen because it brings out two of the most vital points:

Thetford Mines, Quebec, Canada.

As an interested listener to the Camp-Fire discussion, the writer has observed the practically unanimous opposition, of those there assembled, to the efforts put forth by some one who skulks in the shadows to disarm the American people.

WHY don't these anti-weapon advocates come out in the fire-light where we can see who they are and learn just why they want such legislation?

We are told that there is a "nation wide" demand for such laws. Is this true or false? How many Camp-Fire comrades have ever noted such "nation wide" sentiment? Are the American people making the demand, or is it made by the police authority or by so-called reformers who seek to force the majority to obey their bigoted notions? These are all live questions and underlying the whole evil business is the pernicious idea that Constitutional rights can be destroyed by those elected to *serve*, and not to *rule*, the people without referring these vital questions to those by whose sanction they hold office.

Our fathers who established the American Republic did not intend such power to lie in the hands of office holders and therefore removed the question from within the range of legislation by providing the Constitutional guarantee that citizens might have and carry arms. If we submit to this encroachment on Constitutional rights and liberties who can say where the next *lawless* restriction will be applied? If we continue to tamely submit to these lawless filchings of our liberties, we are on the road to a despotism or an oligarchy and they are equally detestable. Let us challenge sharply all such movements. The enclosure from the *Evening Bulletin*, Philadelphia, dated January 20, 1923, is a brief statement of the views of the writer on the anti-weapon question.—S. H. RALSTON.

Sees Right to Carry Arms

Sir: To a native-born citizen of Pennsylvania, temporarily beyond the border of the U. S. A., it is decidedly disconcerting to find The Bulletin, usually so strong for staunch Americanism, coming out in favor of the so-called "anti-revolver" laws now being urged by many "reformers." Close examination of these prospective laws will show them in every case to be onerous to the law-abiding citizen, rather than to the crook. The Constitution of the United States distinctly states that "the right of the citizens to possess and carry arms shall not be infringed." The Bill of Rights of Pennsylvania makes a similar statement in almost the same words. If making the possession and carrying of arms dependent upon the pleasure or whim of a police official or, worse yet, a ward leader or other petty politician, is not an infringement of the Constitutional rights, the writer does not know the meaning of the word "infringe."

In New York, under the detestable Sullivan law, a ward leader was the first man to see to get a gun permit. He would arm the applicant with a note to the police captain and the permit would usually be forthcoming, although the average citizen would seek such a paper in vain, unaided by the politician. This is not ancient history, but right up to 1920. Instead of aiming laws at the constitutional rights of American citizens and seeking by indirect methods to strip him of these fundamental rights, why not back a law which would make mandatory the imposition of double or triple sentences on anyone found in possession of any kind of weapon, and committing or endeavoring to commit an assault, a crime or intimidation; the possession of a weapon under such circumstances being made prima facie evidence of guilt and all parole consideration being distinctly denied to such convicts.

It would be interesting to know just who and what are the persons and motives back of this sinister and un-American movement. The writer is opposed to anything and any movement which aims to strip the citizens of the United States of any fundamental and constitutional rights, which were obtained by the efforts of his forefathers, among other good Americans, at the price of blood, privation and treasure.—S. H. RALSTON, Quebec, Canada.

BE MARKING down your favorite stories for our annual vote by readers on the best fiction published in the magazine during the year. Mark down the stories as you go along and send us the list at the end of the year. We want to print the sort of fiction you like.—A. S. H.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader

In the last issue of each month are printed in full the friendly services of *Adventure* to readers: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons; Camp-Fire Stations, etc.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1 American Waters
BERIAH BROWN, 1624 Biegelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. The Sea Part 2 British Waters
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*. Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

3. The Sea Part 3 Statistics of American Shipping
HARRY E. RIESENBERG, 3633 New Hampshire Ave., N. W. Washington, D. C. Historical records, tonnages, names and former names, dimensions, services, power, class, rig, builders, present and past ownerships, signals, etc., of all vessels of the American Merchant Marine and Government vessels in existence over five gross tons in the United States, Panama and the Philippines, and the furnishing of information and records of vessels under American registry as far back as 1760.

4. Islands and Coasts Part 1 Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*See next section.*)

5. Islands Part 2 Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico and Virgin Group
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Languages, mining, minerals, fishing, sugar, fruit and tobacco production.

6. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1 Cook Islands, Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage eight cents.*)

7. South Sea Islands Part 2 French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumotu, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrones, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn).
CHARLES BROWN, JR., P. O. Box 308, San Francisco Calif. Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

8. ★ Australia and Tasmania
FRANK MORTON, care *Triad* magazine, 19 Castlereagh St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage ten cents.*)

9. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

10. ★ New Guinea
L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, via Sydney, Australia. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions. Questions regarding the measures or policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

11. Philippine Islands.
BUCK CONNOR, 545 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, Calif. History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

12. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 714 Marquette Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelop with five cents—in Mr. Mills' and Mr. Armit's cases eight cents and in Mr. Morton's ten cents—in stamps NOT attached*)

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13. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

14. Asia Part 1 Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Borneo
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, Morgan City, La. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

15. Asia Part 2 Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan
GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York. Hunting, trading, traveling, customs.

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CAPTAIN C. L. OLIVER, care *Adventure*. Natives, language, mining, trading, customs, climate. Arctic Ocean: Winds, currents, depths, ice conditions, walrus-hunting.

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(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

24. Africa Part 8 Sudan
W. T. MOFFAT, 38 Bessborough St., Westminster, London, S. W. 1., England. Climate, prospects, trading, traveling, customs, history.

25. Turkey and Asia Minor
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, geography, races, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

26. Bulgaria, Roumania
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ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, care *Adventure*. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

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EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

32. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil
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33. South America Part 3 Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay
WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 424 Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Geography, travel, agriculture, cattle, timber, inhabitants, camping and exploration, general information.

34. Central America
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

35. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

36. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, Santa Clara, Calif. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

37. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land and Northern Quebec
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Also Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

38. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

39. ✠ Canada Part 3 Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario
GEORGE L. CATTON, 94 Metcalfe St., Woodstock, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. *Postage 3 cents.*)

40. Canada Part 4 Hunters Island and English River District
T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

41. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta
ED. L. CARSON, Monroe, Wash. Including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

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REBEK H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

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JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

44. Alaska
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 1436 Hawthorne Terrace, Berkeley, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, backpacking, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

45. Baffinland and Greenland
VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

46. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

47. Western U. S. Part 2 New Mexico
H. F. ROBINSON, Supervising Engineer, U. S. Indian Irrigation Service, Albuquerque, N. M. Outdoor life, game, trapping, fishing, hunting, history; irrigation; Indian customs, folklore, dances.

48. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.
FRANK MIDDLETON, 705 So. 1st St., Laramie, Wyo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

49. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains.
CHESTER C. DAVIS, Helena, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

50. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country
OTTO M. JONES, Warden, Bureau of Fish and Game, Boise, Idaho. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, outdoor photography, history and inhabitants.

51. Western U. S. Part 6 Tex. and Okla.
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

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52. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

53. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.
JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), Editor *National Sportsman*, 275 Newbury St., Boston, Mass. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

54. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan
JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), Editor *National Sportsman*, 275 Newbury St., Boston, Mass. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

55. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River
GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See next section.*)

56. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Miss., O., Tenn., Michigan and Hudson Valleys, Great Lakes, Adirondacks
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating, river-tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs.

57. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers
HOWARD A. SHANNON, 631 East Fifth Street, Chattanooga, Tenn. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

58. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville
HOWARD A. SHANNON, 631 East Fifth Street, Chattanooga, Tenn. Okefinokee and Dismal, Okranoke and the Marshes of Glynn; Croatan Indians of the Carolinas. History, traditions, customs, hunting, modes of travel, snakes.

59. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Southern Appalachians
WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 424 Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

60. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Box 432, Orlando, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

61. Eastern U. S. Part 6 Maine
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

A.—Radio

DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads —songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. GORDON, 1,262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—**All Shotguns**, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), Editor *National Sportsman*, 275 Newbury Street, Boston, Mass.

2.—**All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers**, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—**Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800.** Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), Editor *National Sportsman*, 275 Newbury St., Boston, Mass. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Tropical Forestry

DR. H. N. WHITFORD, School of Forestry, Yale University, New Haven, Conn. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

G.—Aviation

MAJOR W. G. SCHAUFFLER, JR., National Aeronautic Association, 26 Jackson Place, Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

H.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write J. Cox, care *Adventure*.

For general information on **U. S.** and its **possessions**, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash. D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries**, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico**, and customs receiverships in **Santo Domingo** and **Haiti**, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash, D. C.

For **Alaska**, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii**, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba**, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on **Latin-American matters** or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.**, Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **Canal Zone**, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National **Rifle** Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver** Ass'n. W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Washington, D. C.

Fishing the Hunters Island District

ANOTHER suggestion for vacation days:

Question:—"Through *Adventure* magazine you represent Hunters Island district of Canada.

Objects, fishing, canoeing, photography of game. Have been around west end of Hunters Island, returning by east side; Shortiss Island through to Trout Lake and over that portage to Crooked Lake; enjoyed it. Next up to Lake Insula to boundary around east side; disappointed as to game.

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Will it be worth while to go in from Grand Marais up to the series of lakes along boundary line?

What to your knowledge is the likelihood of seeing moose? I would appreciate an outline of a three weeks' cruise in this district and any other information you see fit to give."—ROY S. BINKLEY, Dayton, O.

Answer, by Mr. Phillips:—The best and easiest way into the Hunters Island country is *via* Winton, Minn. You can get canoes and provision through the Winton Trading Co.

The trip north from Grand Marais is rather rough. The road is constructed for about fifty miles. The remainder is nothing but an old tote-road. Canoeists use it, but after one trip it is a case of "never again." State aid has been withdrawn from this road, so it may be several years before it will be in first-class shape.

The moose have disappeared from this district. After a six-week trip we saw only five, and we worked north of Kaknipie and Sturgeon Lake into the so-called moose country. After a hard fight we have won a five years' closed season on moose for Minnesota.

It's rather difficult to outline a trip when you do not know the party concerned. Why not start from Winton, go east through Basswood and along boundary through Cache Bay into Saganagona, down the Sturgeon River into Kaknipie, then south through Agnes, camping five or six days here? Fish are lake trout, wall-eyed pike, northern pike. You can get out of Agnes through Silence Lake and McNine, Yum Yum, where you should get good bass-fishing. You can go south to Basswood and return through the west arm back to Winton.

If I can be of any other service, just drop me a line.

The full statement of the sections, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Rattlesnake Traits

HOPE I'm not trespassing unduly on the other discussion regarding snake-bite cures that has been carried on for so long in Camp-Fire proper. But in any case I've got to take the chance, because the remedy given below by Mr. Whiteaker is given incidentally to another matter; and it is necessary that the other matter be published, unmutilated and in full, in order to prove that Mr. Whiteaker does know what he's been talking about when he's had occasion to describe the habits of rattlesnakes. Here's the letter that started the ball to rolling:

Canton, China.

MR. J. W. WHITEAKER:—I note in the July 10th, 1922, issue of *Adventure* that you advised Mr. David L. Mar that a horsehair rope is a good protection against snakes. May I ask why you so advised Mr. Mar? Also, have you ever seen a snake balk at crossing a horsehair rope?

I have had some experiences in this line, and my faith in horsehair ropes nearly cost me my life on two separate occasions. Once in Old Mexico I woke up with a rattlesnake between my legs while sleeping within the so-called safe enclosure of a horsehair rope. No, I didn't neatly shoot his head off as they do in the movies; I just shot him plump in half.

The next time was in Arizona, I woke up with a three-foot rattler lying smack-bang on the middle of my chest. This time I did not shoot at all; I was too badly scared, I guess. I don't remember getting to my feet, but I did; and I stood there watching Mr. Snake crawl over that horsehair rope as if it wasn't there at all.

From these experiences I have come to the conclusion that a horsehair rope is just as effective in keeping snakes out of your blankets as a piece of cheese would be in keeping rats out of your house.

If space is available I would suggest that this be printed in *Adventure*, as it would at least give readers a chance for their lives.—E. L. MARSHALL.

To this letter Mr. Whiteaker made the following reply:

Glad to learn that you seem to take such an interest in the "Ask Adventure" activities and would be glad to answer any other questions that you care to ask concerning my territory.

Nothing that I could say about hair ropes and snakes would change your mind on the subject, but I'll buzz a while about it anyway. I do not doubt your experience in Mexico and in Arizona with the horsehair rope and the snakes—for you say so, and as I do not know you, can not dispute your veracity. Still it does seem curious that the snakes in these two incidents that you mentioned should have had such an affinity for you. Many curious and unexplainable happenings occur in this world of ours though, so we will accept it as many other things are accepted.

Did you think to examine the ground encircled by the rope to see if there were any holes in which the snakes could have denned up? Very often rattlesnakes, especially the ground rattler—there are seven varieties of rattlers in Texas—den up in prairie dog, armadillo, tarantula and other holes, so one of these snakes could have easily been within the circle of your rope without your knowledge. Snakeology has not been studied thoroughly by me, and there is a great deal more to be learned about them; still I know a few things, picked up here and yonder.

At the time of year when a snake is shedding its skin—all sections of the country not at the same time—its eyes are dimmed or entirely blinded for several days by the skin slipping over its head and this also applies to its rattlers, so that the snake strikes in the direction of any least noise without either seeing the object or giving warning by rattling. The vibration of a step near by or the falling of a rotten limb from a tree will cause it to strike in that direction.

The shedding time of the year is the most dangerous. More stock, dogs and people are bitten then than at any other time of the year. The poison in the poison sacs is more venomous, as can be judged by the number that die from the bite at that time.

When on a camping trip or in the mountains or

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other reptile-infested region always lay in a good supply of chewing-tobacco, and if bitten by a poisonous snake chew the tobacco and swallow the juice until you are sick at the stomach. I have seen several saved from death by snake-bite in this way. Snuff would be good also; and if you do not care to eat it, make a poultice with water and place on the pit of the stomach. The tobacco is the best all-over-the-country antidote that can be used for first aid in such cases.

One good test to try on a snake to see if it is poisonous, is to hold its head with a forked stick and spit tobacco-juice into its mouth. If the snake is of a poisonous species it will die shortly in great convulsions; if not of a poisonous species the tobacco will not affect it very much. I've tested this out on rattlers, copperheads and water-moccasins; also on king, grass, coach-whips and others. The first three died in a few minutes while the others were not bothered except to accelerate their crawling gait when released.

In Mexico there is a small agave plant with ash-colored leaves covered with vivid spots, known to the Mexicans and Indians in the State of Chihuahua as cebadilla (sneezewort). The juice from the leaves of this plant contains a strong alkaloid, which is used as an antidote for the bite or sting of a poisonous reptile or insect. Snakes flee from the plant, and when irritated and made to bite it, die quickly in convulsions.

Back now to horsehair ropes. The rope you used may have been worn smooth by use or oil—a new rope is sticky, with short end hairs. Perhaps the snake that crossed the rope was blinded by the slipping skin. When in that condition it can not see where it is going, so may cross one or a dozen ropes without knowing it.

I have seen Mexicans capture snakes and keep them in boxes during the week-days and then on Sundays have snake-fights. They would enclose a space of ground with hair ropes and after irritating the rattlers with sticks, etc., turn a couple or more snakes out of the boxes into the enclosure and then bet on their favorite. Often a rattlesnake pilot would be captured; and if there is anything a rattler will run from it is a pilot—they get too frightened even to show fight; and after a pilot chases a rattler around the enclosure a few times, it is pretty safe to say that a rope is not so bad a thing after all. These ropes could have had a bath of cebadilla juice and may have had, but the snakes did not cross over.

Out on my ranch rattlesnakes were very numerous until we thinned them out. Very seldom do we find any now. There were several dens of rattlers when I first went out there, and in one instance there was a honey-combed section near the house in which we found eighteen rattlers in one den and eleven in another.

We tied two hair ropes together and laid them on the ground encircling these dens, then shooed out the snakes by using some greasewood, cedar and shumate smoke. After we got through with the massacre there was not a live snake left, but an awful odor from the dens.

Some of the snakes went as far as the rope and then circled in following it. I didn't see one cross it so can't say whether it was the rope that turned them or just ordinary snake bull-headedness. If it was their mulish disposition it certainly cost them their lives, for some of them could have escaped if they had crossed the rope.

You have asked me why I so advised Mr. Mar, and so I have answered you. Mr. Mar perhaps was not figuring on going out and testing out the hair rope-snake proposition just out of curiosity's sake, but wanted to know something about what he had heard, and I gave him my views on the matter. I hardly see why by publishing your letter that many lives will be saved, but it is up to the "Ask Adventure" editor to dope that out.

Circumstances alter cases, of course, as all broad-minded men will admit, and there may be a number of cases on record where snakes have crossed ropes; still it is the exception and not the rule. I am not setting myself up as an authority on snakes and hair ropes, for I have never spent much time studying about either and am only speaking of what I know from personal observation.

Hope that this answer is satisfactory to you and that you will not hesitate to write again if any thing else published does not suit your fancy.

When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.

A Trip to Japan

ROUTES, seasons, expenses:

Question:—"You are mentioned in *Adventure* as an authority on Japan, and if you will advise me regarding a possible trip to that country I shall be very grateful.

My mother and I should like to go there for the cherry-blossom season—I don't know exactly when that is; April, I presume—and then go on to China, and home. The first-class passenger steamers ask six hundred dollars for a return trip to Yokohama. Can not pay so much, and possibly there are cheaper rates with fair comfort. We are good sailors and healthy; but my mother is seventy, and so of course I am not young; also very hard of hearing. I am a pretty good traveler, and have been to Europe and Honolulu and over most of the United States, besides going through Glacier and the Yellowstone on horseback. I don't like the sea, but mother does, and we both long to see the Orient, and are not afraid to go on a slow boat and eat plain fare; but I am afraid of vermin!

I presume many freight vessels carry passengers, but we'd have to depend upon our own language, so some foreign vessels might be undesirable.

Can you tell me if it would be possible for us to go from Seattle or San Francisco to Yokohama, Shanghai, Hongkong, Manila and return, with liberal stop-overs, for four hundred apiece?

What is the best time to go?

Can you give me any idea of the cost of travel after we land? Does it cost more or less than in the United States?

I've not stuck to Japan, but no one covered both Japan and China, so pardon me if I am wrong."—————, Wolf, Wyo.

Answer, by Mrs. Knudson:—Spring is a very attractive season in Japan. The plum blossoms come in February and March, and the peach and cherry in April. I know of no freight steamers

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carrying passengers, though there may be some. Were I in your place I should communicate with some of the regular passenger lines inquiring for intermediate, or special, and second-class rates. The second-class accommodations on the large steamers are excellent, and the intermediate service is on the smaller and slower but perfectly seaworthy boats.

Write as follows:

To Pacific Mail S. S. Co., California St., San Francisco, Cal., for special and second-class rates and description of accommodations.

To Osaka Shosen Kaisha, Tacoma, Wash., for special trans-Pacific rates.

To Nippon Yusen Kaisha, Seattle, Wash., for second-class trans-Pacific rates.

To China Mail S. S. Co., Ltd., Montgomery St., San Francisco, Cal., for both first and second class rates.

To Canadian Pacific Ocean Services, Ltd., Windsor St. Station, Montreal, Que., for Pacific rates on the *Empress of Japan* and the *Monteagle*.

While the rates may be about the same, you can choose the accommodations you like best.

English is spoken on the Japanese boats.

Four hundred dollars would not take you on the trip you outline. I should not advise you to prepare for it unless you have one thousand dollars apiece—fifteen hundred dollars apiece would be better.

The best time to go, if you want to see the cherry-blossoms, is the Spring. Otherwise I prefer the climate of September and October. It is dry and fine then and quite as beautiful.

It would perhaps cost you more there to travel on land than in the States because you would be obliged to accept a certain grade of accommodations—there would be no choice for you as foreign women. You need to allow at least ten dollars per day apiece for every day you plan to stay on land. That would cover expenses at the smaller European hotels like the Pleasanton in Yokohama for instance. From them you could learn the names of the inexpensive hotels elsewhere.

To allow for stopping at first-class hotels you'd need to reckon on at least fifteen dollars per day each. This would cover railway fares, rickshaws, spending for sundries, etc.—all absolutely necessary expenses for two women traveling alone.

I'm sorry I can't be more encouraging, but I don't dare advise you on any lower costs.

Ax Lore

IT TAKES more than main strength and ignorance, Mr. City Man, to chop down a tree:

Question:—"I would appreciate a few pointers on the methods, etc., used by professional wood-cutters, as follows:

1. In felling trees, is a saw or ax generally used?
2. Do professional woodsmen use the single or double bit ax?
3. Usual weight of ax-heads both single and double bit?
4. Best method of sharpening axes to insure long life?
5. Can you recommend any particular make of ax as used by professionals as being specially good and long-lived?
6. Do felling-methods differ much as practised in the northern and southern parts of the country?
7. Are narrow or broad blade two-man saws generally used, and for what purpose is each employed?
8. Is the "Champion" tooth or regular V-tooth saw used mostly by professionals, and which has the best advantage?
9. Any general or specific information you care to give as to the proper method of felling trees will be greatly appreciated by"—ALFRED H. SEELEY, Demarest, N. J.

Answer, by Mr. Liebe:—1. Both an ax and a saw are generally used down here for felling trees. The ax makes a notch for starting the saw and is used on the other side to keep the tree from splitting off upward when it falls.

2. Both the single and double bit ax are used by woodsmen. It is largely a matter of personal preference.

3. I don't remember the weight of ax-heads that woodsmen use. They are usually a little heavier, however, than ordinary ax-heads. Here, also, the matter of personal preference comes in. And a big man will swing a bigger ax ordinarily than a small man.

4. Axes are sharpened best by grinding on a grindstone with water. Emery wheels are likely to heat the steel and remove or "spot" the temper, and may case-harden. The particular fellows whet their axes on oilstones after the grindstone.

5. There are many good makes of axes—and it is entirely possible to find a bad ax in any good make. I recommend any standard brand.

6. Don't know how trees are felled in the North. It is probably much the same as in the South.

7. The narrow and the broad cross-cut saw each has its advantages. When wedges are used in "throwing" trees in a certain direction, the narrow blade gives more room for wedging. The narrow saw is more inclined to "lead"—that is, pull off to one side—than the broader blade. The backs of the broader saws should be tapered thin to keep them from "pinching" in the cut. One nice thing about the narrower saw is its lightness.

8. The Champion tooth is better than the ordinary V-tooth because it has room in the gullet or throat to chamber the sawdust. Haven't seen a V-tooth in a long time.

9. There is quite an art in felling trees. Nearly always you want a tree to fall in a particular direction, which is to prevent damage to that tree or to another or for later convenience. From one to four iron wedges, driven by a heavy maul, are often used. The side the tree is cut from, and the manner of cutting, to "swing the heft," is all-important. Many a first-cut (log) has been ruined by improper felling. If there is any wind, it must be taken into consideration.

"Workshop of Experimental Legislation"

SUCH is the title one British Commonwealth earned for itself by assuming leadership in the passage of legislation which, both there and here, has long been beyond the experimental stage:

Question:—"Having seen your name in 'Ask Adventure' as the correspondent covering New Zealand,

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I am writing to ask you if you will write to me concerning the country and also tell me where I can secure literature.

Is the Government Socialistic? What inducements are offered to settlers? About how much money would one have to have to get started on a small farm? We have a family and would have to be near schools. In fact we have more family than money.

Am enclosing postage for return letter.

A number of people in here are interested in that country so quite a number might go."—Mrs. F. H. Fry, Burriss, Ont., Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—Twenty or thirty years ago New Zealand was called by political economists of that day "the workshop of experimental legislation." In those days much that was called practical Socialism materialized on to our statute books—such as ideal factory laws, conditions for shop assistants, the abolition of sweat-shops, better housing conditions for miners and other workers, reform in the living-quarters for the workers on steamships, adequate accommodation for shearers and other farm workers. That legislation still stands, although changes of Government have taken place.

The Government to-day is anti-Socialistic. Our land laws have been and are very liberal toward the *bona-fide* settler, who has been tremendously helped from State funds during the past decade.

The trouble the outsider has to face today is that returned soldiers have created such a demand for land that it is hard to obtain sections even for would-be soldier settlers. Therefore you would have to face the prospect of having to buy out a freehold, and that comes pretty expensive these days. More family than money is a decided handicap for you in a new country. You would need enough money to keep you going whilst you spied out the land—and that takes time also. I am getting the Government to send you some literature on settlement.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

The Panama Peoples

AMONG those present are our old friends the San Blas, who seem to create an especial interest every time they pop into print:

Question:—"Would be very glad to receive any information you can give me regarding the life, habits, history, and in fact any information you may have of the San Blas Indians. Their lands, mode of living, present and past conditions.

I am in the theatrical profession and am contemplating an act in which all this is necessary.

I have read a great deal in the past regarding these people in *Adventure;* but, not having made any effort to retain the information contained therein, I am now all at sea."—Chick Varnell, Cincinnati, O.

Answer, by Mr. Emerson:—In the years 1501 to 1503, when Rodrigo de Bastidas and Christopher Columbus visited the northern coast of the Isthmus of Panama, they found it densely populated. About ten years later Balboa met with identical conditions along the southern coast, and all subsequent reports of early explorers give evidences of the fact that the whole country was in possession of numerous clans, the names of several of which have been preserved, *viz.*, Guaymies, the Cuna-Cuna (former name of the San Blas Indians) and the Chocos.

For your theatrical purposes I will give you two of the three, from which you can pick the high spots for your production.

Up in the forbidding mountains and valleys that form a background to the landscape for the traveler on the steamers plying between Panama and David, dwell the mass of the present Guaymies (pronounced Why-mees), about 5,000 in number, in their homes scattered through *savannas* (plains) and forests. From the time of the conquest to the beginning of the past century they have been more or less under the influence of Catholic missionaries, but have since been left to most of their ancient customs and ways of living.

Among the few vestiges left of that transitory semi-civilized condition under religious discipline, perhaps the most conspicuous is the flowing gown of the women, tight around the neck and reaching down to the feet. When there is no stranger near, the gown is mostly discarded; and if a rain-shower surprizes a caravan on the trail, the women quickly strip, wrap their togs in a large banana leaf, place the parcel on the head and continue on their way.

The men do likewise. Besides, when they go on a hunting expedition they invariably abandon their trousers before starting on a run after some wild animal, in which case the shirt forms the only part of the male wearing apparel, it being taken off and tied around the loins.

This tribe is not of a very prepossessing appearance. Their stature is rather variable, and their bearing has not the stateliness that is often noticed among other Indians.

Among the women we met a few who were actually pretty (and they knew it). Face-painting is a common practise, restricted by neither age nor sex, although the women seldom adorn themselves except on great occasions. Black, red and white are the favorite colors, being ordinary oil paint sold by the traders from schooners along the coast mostly bought in the town of Bocas del Toro (meaning Mouths of the Bull.)

Little girls keep their faces clean, but boys under twelve were seen with broad black blotches, without definite outline, around their eyes. In men the decoration is more elaborate, and certain patterns, as well as the exact repetition of these by distinct people, leads to the belief that they formerly and may still have a significance as a totemic or tribal emblem.

The typical Guaymi dwelling is a round house about twenty-four feet in diameter with a conical thatched roof, bare ground floor and a fireplace in the middle or at the side. These houses are not always walled. No windows, but have two doors placed at the opposite ends—diametrically opposite.

The walls are made of vertical sticks tied together with vines and the north side is plastered, so as to afford a protection against the wind. This plaster is made of cow-dung and clay. Benches along the walls are used as beds, although when in high altitudes, where the temperature is often very low at night, are used for wardrobes and closets, and the tilling, fishing, and hunting implements. These—

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all of the primitive type except the guns—complete the house furnishings.

Large earthern jars are used to keep the *chica* (corn beer) in, accompanied with the calabashes, of universal use for drinking-cups in the tropics.

The Cuna-Cuna or San Blas Indians: According to historical records, confirmed by tradition and by a few local names, their territory extended formerly as far as the valleys of the eastern reaches of the Chagres River, and covered both sides of the Continental Divide between the present Canal Zone and the Bays of San Miguel and Atrato. In the course of the conquest they offered a steady and stubborn resistance, and, though they have been gradually deprived of a large part of their former territory, it is certain that to this day they never have been really subjected. The backwoods aborigines, in the valleys of the Bayano and Chucunaque Rivers, have nourished to this date their hatred for all strangers, especially those of Spanish blood (with —— good reason!).

Among these San Blas Indians, who are at a far higher level of civilization, the exclusion of aliens is the result of well-founded political reasons (and others). Their respected traditions are a long record of proud independence; they have maintained the purity of their race and enjoyed freely for hundreds of years every inch of the territory they now have.

They feel that the day the negro or the white man acquires a foothold in their midst, these privileges will become a thing of the past. This is why, without undue hostility to strangers, they discourage their incursions.

Besides being excellent sailors and fishermen the San Blas Indians excel in agricultural pursuits. The whole coast, as well as the numerous islands of Mandinga Bay and farther east, are lined with extensive coconut-palm groves, of a variety remarkable for the superior quality and shape of the nuts. Vast areas of the forests are covered with the native ivory-nut palm and the larger growth abounds in balata, or bully-trees.

The last three products—coconuts, ivory-nuts, and balata—which are sold or bartered either to local traders or to trading-schooners, are the main source of wealth of these natives, among whom money is never scarce and poverty is an unknown thing. The staple crops for local consumption, besides most of the usual fruits of tropical America, are plantains, corn, rice, cassava, yams and some cacao (from which chocolate is made).

You ought to be able to get three good sets out of this letter.

Come again if I can help you further.

The Chocos are interesting, but not like the San Blas.

LOST TRAILS

Note—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

EBERY, GORDON or George Meredith. Australian Sugar Expert. Disappeared from Toledo, Ohio, Nov. 13, 1922. Any information will be appreciated by his wife.—Address MRS. G. E. MEREDITH, Box 127, Lancaster, Mass.

ROYCROFT, LOYD C. Left home Nov. 14th, 1922. Is probably employed as an oiler on some boat. Important news for him by writing to.—Address 333 Lester Ave., Oakland, Calif.

KEY, MAGGIE. Wife of John Wesley Key (deceased) or any of their children. John W. Key believed to have been killed in railroad shops at Ft. Worth, Texas. Any information will be appreciated.—Address W. A. KEY, R. F. D. 6, Weatherford, Texas.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February 10th issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

COMPANY "M", 23RD INFANTRY. All men who served overseas in this outfit are wanted to get in touch with us. We are publishing an Overseas Directory and Encyclopedia of the Company. If you served before, or since, in this Company you are wanted too.—Address LAURENCE D. BATSON, P. O. Box 542, Riverdale, Md.

HIRTLE, REGINALD. Last heard of in Jersey City, N. J. December, 1921. Important news to his advantage by writing.—Address BILL BLEASDALE, Watford, Lunenburg Co., N. S., Canada.

GEVERT, RICHARD. Resides in Chicago. Last seen in London, England, April 1919. Write to your old army pal.—Address BILL DOUCETTE, 1019 Queen St., E., Sault Ste. Marie, Ont. Can.

HOLLMAN, HARRY and KROGH, JOHN. Let me know where you are. Have news of V. Brezavicz, who parted with Harry at Frisco.—Address F. E. T., care of *Adventure.*

BRANCHER, G. W. Please write to Pearl, your daughter. All is forgotten. Mother is in poor health.—Address P. M. WARNER, care of *Adventure.*

MCCUTCHEON, ERNEST. Last heard from in Saskatchewan and Alberta, Canada. Supposed to have taken up land in that section. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address WALTER MCCUTCHEON, 9 Washington Sq., Haverhill, Mass.

LEWIS, ARTHUR C. Please write home. Have important message.—Address MRS. PAULINE LEWIS, 922 N. Madison Ave., Kewanee, Ill.

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KUBIK, CHARLES J. Left home fifteen years ago. Last heard from was in the West. Age about thirty-six years, brown hair, light blue eyes, short and stocky build. Has three fingers disfigured on one hand. Mother is ill in Northampton Hospital. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MRS. ANNA E. CHANDLER, 91 Old Bridge St., West Springfield, Mass.

BOYS of TROOP "G" and 7th Cavalry, who were with me in Malabang, Overton, etc., during 1910-11-12. Also Fort McKinley, Rizal, P. I. 1912 and 1913. Also any of the gang of the 132nd Co. C. A. C. Ft. H. G. Wright, N. Y., 1914-15 and 1916. Dutch Glass, Si Perkins or any of the old bunch. Also any of the old bunch of the 5th Sanitary Train, 5th Div., during the late war. Please write.—Address H. B. JEWELL, care of *Adventure*.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

RICHARDS, CLEON. Last heard of in Los Angeles, Calif., about a year ago. Any information will be appreciated.—Address JAMES C. TURNER, Box 104, Weissdale, Florida.

FINN, HUCK. Where are you? Expect to sail for Tasmania this Summer. Please write.—Address BOOZER BLAIR, Gen. Delivery, Brockville, Ont., Can.

MCGOVERN, THOMAS P. Served in Troop "G" 11th Cav., 1901 until 1913 or 1916, and during the war in "M." Dept., somewhere in Oklahoma. Died in St. Elisabeth's Hospital, Washington, D. C. some time in 1919. Left Government insurance and small amount of money in bank. Had sister living in Montreal but may have left there. Any relatives, or any one knowing of any, communicate with W. M. KARTSMARK, Blaine, Washington.

MEMBERS of 51ST. AERO SQUADRON, MINEOLA, L. I., 5th Provisional Squadron, Dayton, Ohio, Sec. 13, Kelly Field, Texas, Squadrons C. & N. Ellington Field, Houston, Texas, or men who were at the Savage Arms School at Utica, N. Y. during the past war. Would like to hear from any of the men who served in the above outfits.—Address R. W. CUNNINGHAM, 1030 Cleveland Ave., Niagara Falls, N. Y.

RUCKER, C. RYAN. Industrial Insurance operator. Fluent talker, slightly deformed. Disappeared last summer in Oklahoma. Any information will be appreciated by his family.—Address Box 473, Columbia, S. C.

THE following have been inquired for in either the June 10th or June 30th issues of Adventure. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine:

BRENNAN, Jack; Burnett, Thos.; Carver, Bernard R.; Cleland, Herbert; Cloud, Charles; Corley, Charles; Drewes, Harold V. (Tex); Fuller, W. J.; Furtado, Mary; Hoffman, William; Huff, Ray or sister Vera; Krestoslar, Jerry; Lindsay, Willard C.; Lyman, Robert; Martin, Nase; McGovern, James and Joseph; Miller, Charles; Moore, Robert (Bob); Miller, Mr.; Murphy, Edmond R.; Norton, Walter (Prof.); O'Donnell, Michael C.; Ogg, John; O'Rourke, John; Porter, Edward Beck; Russell, Robert Lawrence; Wammack, Ray; Whitefoot, Jack.

UNCLAIMED MANUSCRIPTS

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JULY 30TH ISSUE

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